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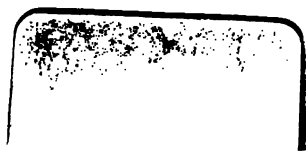
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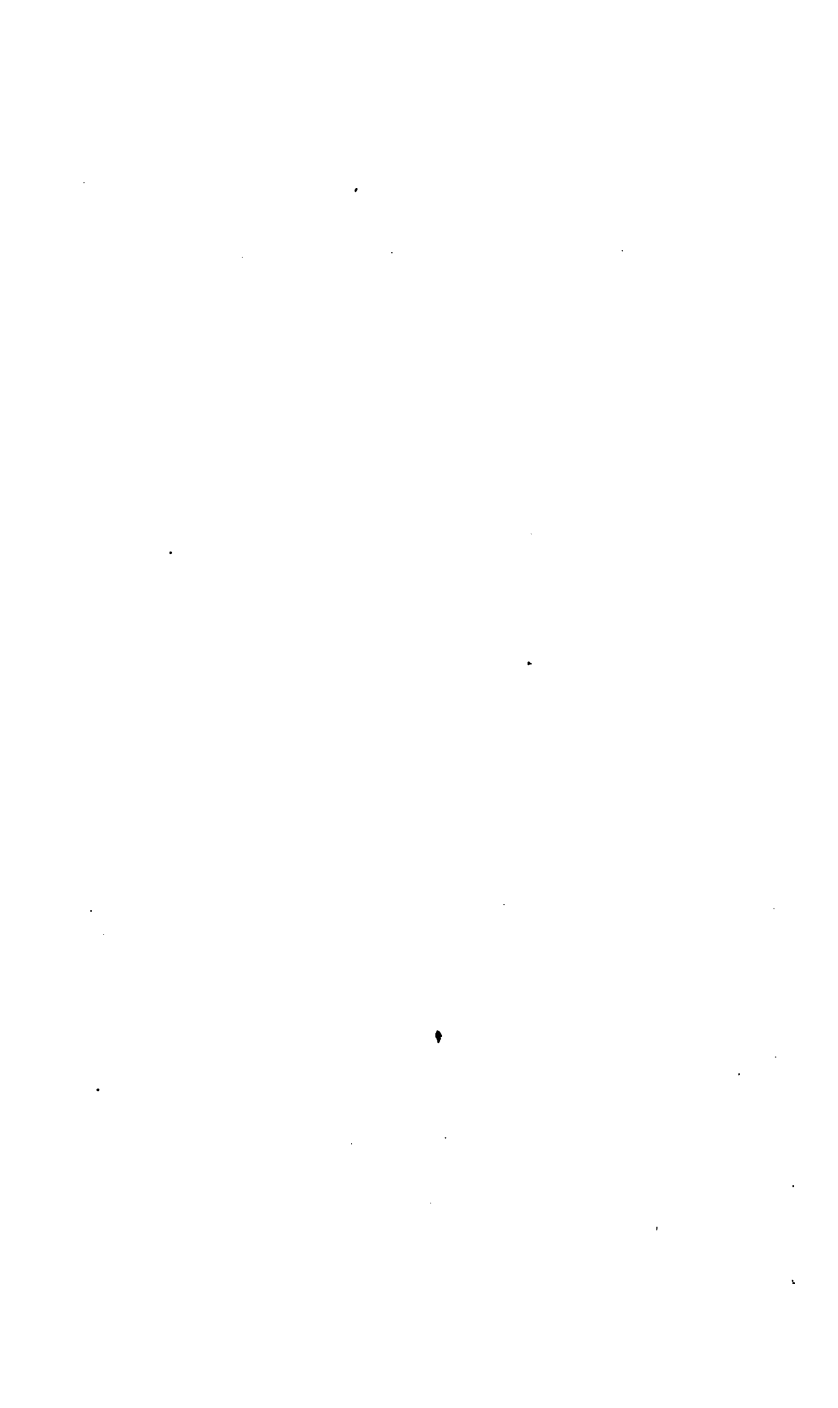
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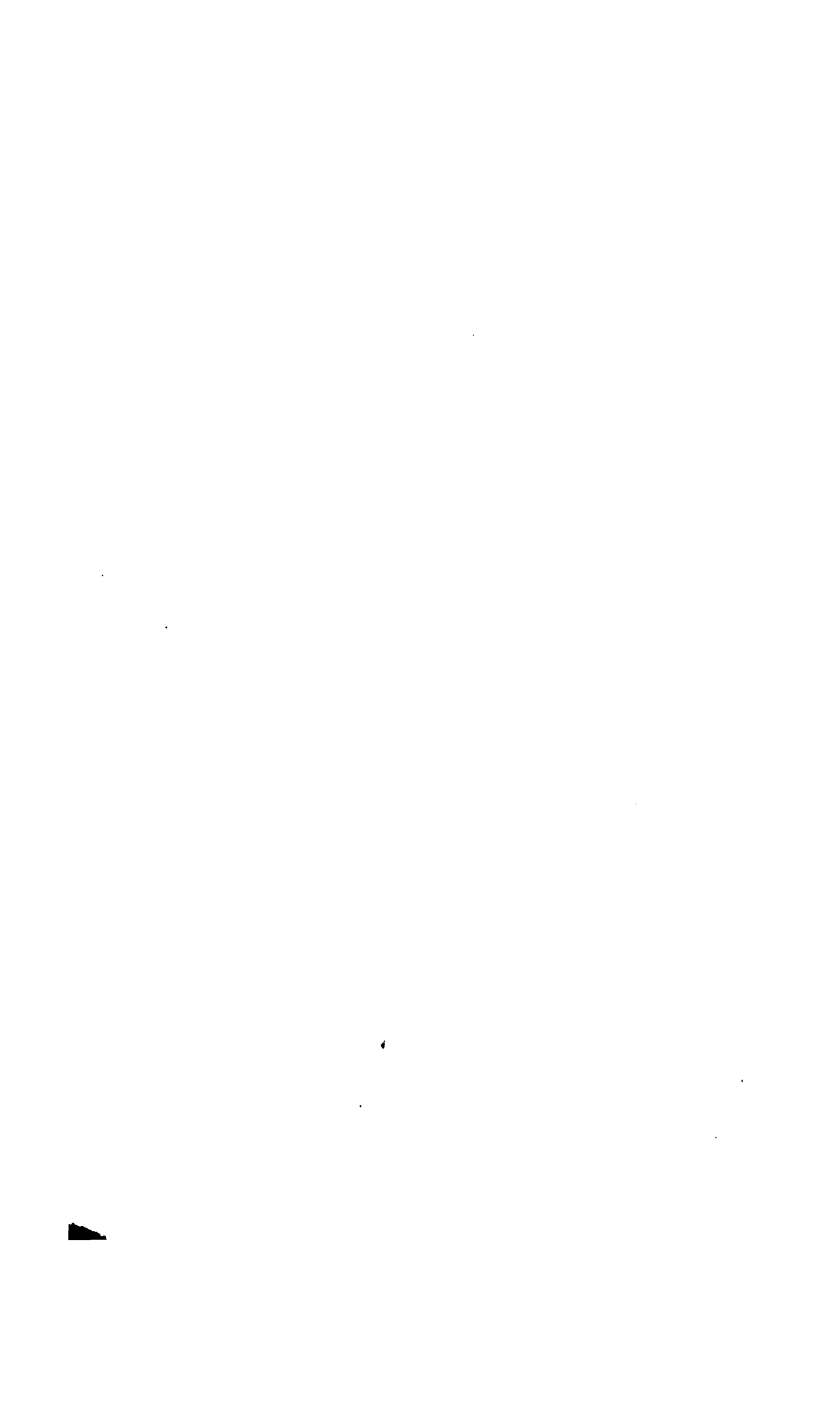




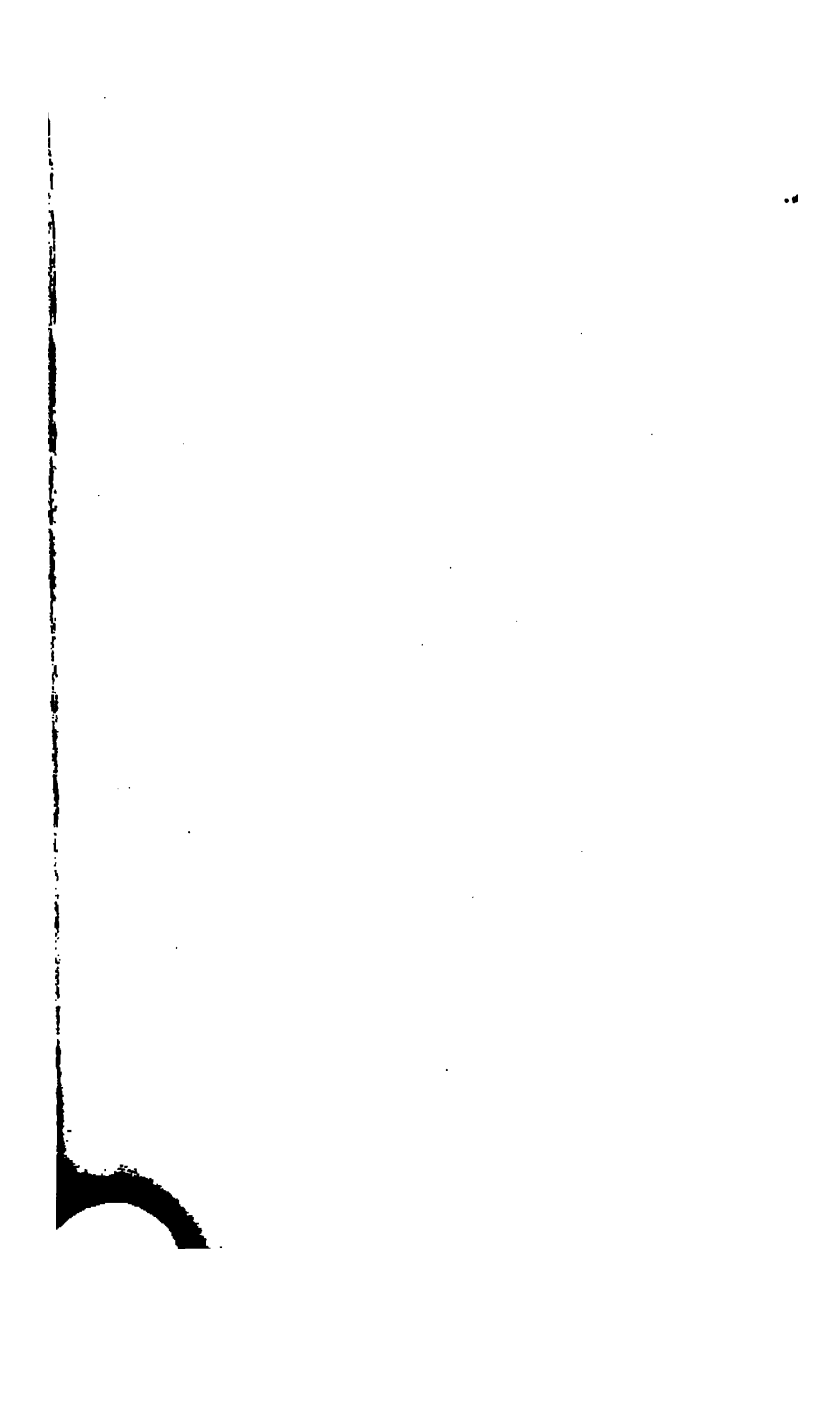
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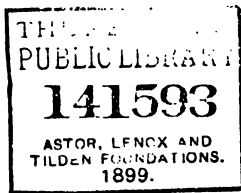
HOW HINDSIGHT MET PROVINCIALATIS

L. CLARKSON WHITELOCK




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DEDICATION

My Dear M. E. M.:

How often and at what length have we not discussed the various character-growths that we ascribed to the Northern or to the Southern environment! Over and over again I am carried back in pleasant retrospect to the days wherein we sat down by still waters of converse in those green pastures of the Berkshires which have for so long been dear to you, and which you have helped make equally dear to me.

There you recalled for my benefit New England anecdotes of past decades, in which memory touched for you the prim methods and quaint speech of girlhood's days. There I recounted for your amusement stories which had somehow drifted down to me out of that fast-changing Old South of Before the War.

You will recollect how confidently we winnowed those reminiscences, separating to our own satisfaction the sterling worth of Northern traits from the equally excellent charm of Southern characteristics. How I laughed when you confided to me your travails with a relentless New England conscience, and how you were delighted to hear me confess that I have still lurking in my blood all the dear obsolete prejudices of the Southland! To you, therefore, I dedicate these stories, many of which are already half your own.

L. CLARKSON WHITELOCK.



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PROVINCIALATIS

A SUNNY PRELUDE

*"The South shall bless, the East shall blight;
The red rose of the Dawn shall blow;
The millioned-lilied streams of night
Wide in etherial meadows flow;
And Autumn mourn; and everything
Dance to the wild pipe of the Spring."*

WILLIAM WATSON.

ALL through the serene heart of the Sunny South are favored towns and villages still unspoiled by the newly imported rush of universal improvement. This absence of the spirit of modernity, instead of rendering the atmosphere gloomy, imparts an aristocratic air of reserve which is greatly prized by the inhabitants. The bustle of business activity that is effectually waking up the drowsy Cotton States hurries by and leaves to these enchanted spots much of that primitive tranquillity which gives their people the repose of gentlefolks, even though

often beggared of their traditional inheritance and forced to eat the bitter bread of self-maintenance.

But for the overwhelming negro population—ragged, shiftless, bound inevitably to the lowest conditions by the perpetual paralysis of idleness—the charm of these sequestered places would be complete.

Such a town is Provincialatis, whose exact situation may not easily be found upon any map. The shadows of life take on there a warmer tone than is known in northern latitudes. And the sketches made of its human nature are full of unaccountable high-lights.

**THE WOMAN WHO GAVE UP
THE STRUGGLE**



THE WOMAN WHO GAVE UP THE STRUGGLE

*"Is it true, O Christ in heaven, that the
wisest suffer most?
That the strongest wander farthest and most
hopelessly are lost?
That the mark of rank in Nature is capacity
for pain?
That the anguish of the singer lends its sweet-
ness to the strain?"*

CHAPTER I

PROVINCIALATIS (BEFORE THE WAR)

NOT a whit do the Provincialatins criticise their wooden sidewalks, their primitive cobble-stones, their badly lighted streets where the turkey-buzzard is the only scavenger, and their impossible drainage. What they consider of paramount importance is their noble situation in its amphitheatre of green hills near the mouth of a magnificent river, and their heritage to the favored spot

on earth, the aristocratic Commonwealth. It is true Provincialitis does not belong to that South we mean when we speak of the Cotton States. But the feelings of Provincialists could not be more unmitigatedly Southern if their beautiful hills and valleys were removed to the uttermost ricefields of South Carolina.

All who dwell beyond the prescribed pale of the Provincialists' "South" are barbarians. But there are no barbarians upon whom the conservative Southern gentlewoman of twenty years ago looked with so much of dread as the advanced female of the North. This was not a mere revolt of the nineteenth century against the new woman (indeed, I am told the new woman is rising and prevailing even in the Cotton States), but an inherited prejudice which had been inculcated for generations into her blood. Just as the Northern woman dreads being gushing, so the Southern woman dreads being literary. What she understands, even to-day, is charm, not cleverness. What she desires is to captivate, not create. The higher education presents no attraction to her feminine mind. The literary life does not appeal to her fancy. She regards her Northern sisters' higher mental standards as unpleasant departures from the norm, and

secretly suspects the good-breeding of a woman who has published a book.

It may be imagined how superior to advanced book-learning was the sentiment of Provincialitis more than five and thirty years ago — the year of the war — when Virginia Gordon returned from a New England boarding-school. She had been brought up in the charming indolence of a wealthy Southern home, and knew nothing of “isms” until she went North to be educated.

The Towers was the rich inheritance of that branch of the Gordons represented by her father, Henrico Gordon, whom for his courtly bearing and imposing manners, the squires of his day called Lord Gordon. A title of some sort nearly every Southern gentleman acquires; and neither colonel nor major seemed quite distinctive enough for the fastidious owner of The Towers. So the lordly soubriquet grew upon him; and it was suspected that during a much-talked-of sojourn in Europe, Henrico Gordon had in fact made use of the title as his own. He was a man of magnificent presence, if not always correct habits or unimpeachable morals. The negro slaves swarming over his half-tilled estate adored him as a veritable demigod. This character he carried out superbly in his family circle and in his county relations.

There were two sons — alas! for the unknown graves that war dug for them and for hundreds, just as young, just as proud, just as full of courage . . .

And there was one daughter, Virginia, who inherited the beauty of a long line of Gordons and the grace of generations of Henricoës. But something else Virginia inherited from some unknown or forgotten source, which she kept hidden in the secret recesses of her own nature. It was an unappreciated commodity, of minus value in the estate to which she had been born.

"If father knew, he would never forgive me," she said to herself with a shiver, feverishly destroying the fragments of fiction, the snatches of verse, that were torn from her, as it were by an overwhelming passion for writing which at times she found irresistible.

At the fashionable Massachusetts school to which she was sent, the standards were probably adjusted to the Southern idea of lady-like acquirements. But while there she had sent surreptitiously a dramatic sketch to one of the leading magazines. It went anonymously, with only the obviously fanciful feminine signature *Erith Penrose*. Mailed in Boston during a half-holiday in that unsympathetic city which always frightened the gentle Southern girl, no clue reached the

unsuspecting Gordons of Virginia's lapse. Strange to say, the article never found her out, although the stir it created spread far and wide. It was unique, the critics said. They seized upon it with an avidity that made Virginia tremble; and *Erith Penrose* became a nine days' wonder. She sent to The Towers a Boston paper which quoted from the dramatic sketch and commented upon the wonderful achievement of an unknown woman. Virginia marked the article and awaited results. The answer turned backward the whole current of her existence. She seemed to hear the conversation which prompted the letter.

MRS. GORDON. — Why do you reckon Virginia sent us this paper, Mr. Gordon, with something marked about a woman who has written something? I hope she isn't getting any Northern ideas in her head about women writers.

MR. GORDON. — If she is, she will have to be sent for. I can't have a daughter of mine — a Gordon and a Henrico, to say nothing of the Culpeppers, Margaret — contaminated with those Yankee notions.

MRS. GORDON. — I always thought it was a risk to send her North.

MR. GORDON. — Well, my dear, there was no way of educating her here. But I'll write and express my opinion on the subject.

MRS. GORDON. — She ought to be above such ideas, with her blood and breeding.

MR. GORDON. — Of course, my dear, and so she is. Doubtless she only sent the paper for a joke. But I'll write to her, anyway. There's no reason for her to be reading about women of genius.

It was a consciousness of these characteristic remarks conveyed through the letter which checked forever the impetuous flow of Virginia Gordon's career. The recollection of it always gave her a spiritual chill whenever that torrent of inspiration within her burst the barriers of her inherited prejudices, and wrung from her songs and snatches which, could the critics have seen them, would have caused them to clamor once more for the genius of the hour.

The summons recalling her home to all the terrors and uncertainties of the Civil War followed so closely her father's scathing sentence of disapproval that the two ideas became, as it were, welded into one. She found it difficult to separate in her own mind the downfall of her cause, and confiscation of her inheritance, from the shipwreck of her unformed literary aspirations.

From time to time, with infinite pains to conceal her secret, she had managed to send to a New York magazine several of her

wonderful dramatic episodes: pictures raked red-hot from the fiery scene of war. The mystery of *Erith Penrose* again stirred and puzzled readers and critics. The editor made unavailing search for his will-o'-the-wisp contributor, offering to pay liberally for anything coming from that brilliant source.

But Virginia Gordon, effectually hidden from the world, beggared of her noble inheritance, bereft of her father and brothers, had taken upon her young shoulders the yoke of John Westmoreland.

CHAPTER II

WESTMORELAND HOUSE (AFTER THE WAR)

VIRGINIA.—If only we could afford it, John, I believe I might get well at a sanitarium.

(Virginia Westmoreland's education in the North prevented her from invariably addressing her husband as "Mr. Westmoreland," after the Provincial Latin custom.)

JOHN.—I can't make out why, dearest. There's no climate on this terrestrial ball more salubrious than this very county.

(John Westmoreland, it will be observed, indulged in all the delightful characteristics

of speech dear to his ancestors. He also revelled in their strong local attachments and their unmodified loyalty to personal environment.)

VIRGINIA. — But it is the rest I need, John, and quiet, and a chance to — think.

JOHN. — Now, look heah, Virginia, where on God's earth could you find the rest and comfort that you get in your own home? Haven't you got a lot of niggers to wait on you, hand and foot?

VIRGINIA (*sighing*). — Oh, John! can't you see how grinding it all is? How poor! — how meagre! — how painful! —

John Westmoreland casts his eyes upon the dingy surroundings, whose faded and almost slovenly details seem not to strike his mental vision as they do that of his wife. There is a nervous dilation of pupil, a strained tension of lip, that is almost painful, in Virginia Westmoreland's face, which her husband fails to notice. It has been growing upon her in the ten years of their married life; years full to overflowing of cares and children and lack of luxuries and press of anxieties. The struggle to live has worn terribly upon her sensitive organism, while the happy, drowsy indifference of her husband's temperament has been in no way perturbed. He does not even perceive a

thousand petty trials and economies and shabby make-shifts which eat into Virginia's soul.

The children have come with frightful rapidity — five of them piling one upon another. She has had no other assistance in caring for them than irresponsible negroes. Virginia has never had a day's holiday from the grind of domestic routine since she came as a bride to the old ramshackle Westmoreland house, whose decay long antedated the Civil War that desolated The Towers.

John Westmoreland is a gentleman of excellent family connections, easy-going temper, and a joyous manner entirely incompatible with his incapacity, or rather his indifference, as to making both ends meet. He has no means of livelihood beyond his wife's slender income, a pitiful remnant of ante-bellum wealth. Most of his time is spent in lounging upon a sofa with the solace of his favorite tobacco. For the rest, he occupies himself with hunting, fishing, shooting, in a desultory fashion that brings but little quarry to Westmoreland house.

After one of his long expeditions he has sauntered empty-handed into the large, littered living-room where Virginia spends her days worrying and wrestling with impossible domestic problems. His good-humored laugh

and nonchalant jest grate strangely upon her tired nerves.

VIRGINIA. — Oh, John! If only you would not bring all that mud in on your boots!

JOHN. — See heah, Virginia; you don't have to sweep it up, now do you?

VIRGINIA. — Yes, I do; unless I take the babies while Diana sweeps it up.

JOHN. — Well, what's the use of a lot of niggers —

But Virginia, feeling the uselessness of explaining for the hundredth time that the lot of niggers has dwindled to the old cook, the boy-of-all-work, and Diana the nurse, holds up her thin hand deprecatingly.

VIRGINIA. — Won't you close the door, John? You left it ajar, and there is a draught on Gwendolin. She seems more feverish than usual, poor little dear.

JOHN. — Diana, you lazy nigger, why don't you shut the door?

The master of the house relapses into a sprawling attitude, and Virginia rising quietly closes the door; for Diana's usefulness in that department is modified by the fact that she is submerged beneath the weight of two babies, one on each knee.

John begins to tease his oldest boy Jack, who presently sets up a roar, joined by Teddy, the second. Little Gwendolin coughs

incessantly from her refuge in Virginia's lap. As bedlam waxes more and more noisy, Virginia presses her hand to her forehead and utters the plaint that opens this narrative.

"I sometimes think," she adds apologetically, "if I could have a change — a diversion" —

John Westmoreland shifts his position to a more luxurious if less elegant one: "Well, I declare, darling, a body might s'pose a woman with five children had all the diversion she could manage. I'm sure they're lively enough;" and he laughs uproariously at his own joke. Virginia's pale face flushes. Putting Gwendolin gently down, and disengaging herself from Jack's sticky embrace, she goes out of the room and hurries blindly up the broad, bare stairway to a dusty upper chamber which has been for ten years the only witness of overstrained nerves and wounded feelings.

"Oh," she moans, wringing her hands, "if only I could go away somewhere — anywhere — and let out what is pent up within me, I might go on living and enduring. If only I dared to give vent to it all, I might ease my heart. But it is always the house, the kitchen needs, the negroes' wants, the children's food and clothes and ailments, and John's indifference to the ruinous con-

dition of everything, and the unpaid interest on the mortgage, and the debts — the accumulating debts."

Voices from below in chorus: Mamma, where are you? Mamma, Teddy hit me. Mis' Faginia, dey isn't any mo' co'n-meal in de bar'l. Virginia, darling, where are you? Why don't you come down? La, Mis' Virginia, I reckon dis chile done goin' to have the measles next, etc.

"Oh, my God, my God!" cries the poor tired girl (she is but twenty-nine — you may still pity her). "If only I could go somewhere to be rid of it all, if only for a month, for a week, and say the things that are bursting within me to be said, perhaps" —

She descends the dusty stairway slowly, the pent-up passion tearing at her heart, which has taken to fluttering violently. Poor Virginia! she has repressed her instincts, stifled her desires, crushed her talents, through a hard, long struggle with life's little miseries, until her health has at last given way. Added to the burdens of poverty and overwork, has come the burden of physical illness.

"See heah, Virginia," says John Westmoreland, sitting up as she comes wearily into the room, "it strikes me you do look pale. I declare if you haven't been crying!"

"No, no," she begins to protest, and then breaks down and weeps upon his shoulder as he gathers her into his arms; for, selfish and idle as he is, he adores his pretty, graceful wife, and is proud of what he calls her "managing capacity."

"Oh, John, John! I am so tormented! I think — I think I shall die if" —

"If what, darling?"

But the secret has been too long buried in her tumultuous breast to speak now, and she falls back upon the former cry: "If I can't go away to a sanitarium."

"Look heah," says John, straightening himself with one of his rare efforts at manly decision; "you shall go. We'll raise the money somehow — or borrow it. Fauquier'll be delighted to lend it to me — if that's all you need to bring you 'round, Virginia."

His voice breaks a little. His wife's pallor, just realized, has effectually startled him from his habitual unconcern.

"Oh, John!" is all she can sob, her arms around his neck, while the children cling about her knees and tug at her dress, howling dismally, and the devoted Diana blubbers sympathetically in the background.

Then Virginia lifts her head and looks at him with a new light shining in her eyes as from some hidden fire.

"Don't worry about the money. I think I can get hold of enough to pay expenses. Don't ask me how."

But presently a realization of the helplessness of her family is forced upon her.

"John, who will take care of you all, and the house, and the place" —

"Never you mind!" cries the optimistic master of Westmoreland house. "I'll get Mary Culpepper to come. She hasn't had a home since the Wah. She'll be delighted to look after things."

To John's thinking everybody was always delighted to render him the assistance he never hesitated to ask for.

CHAPTER III

ERITH PENROSE

VIRGINIA WESTMORELAND went for six months to Plattsville Sanitarium, and the method of her wonderful cure was unlike any other on record at the Institution. Upon her arrival, her first interview with the physician-in-chief resulted in the usual diagnosis of overtaxed nerves and overstrained constitution, with the inevitable prescription of absolute quiet and unbroken idleness. But

Virginia had not escaped from the hampering conditions and endless impediments of her home affairs, to be hindered by a new set of restrictions. She took matters in her own hands, having made up her mind that but one course of cure was possible to her starved being. She allowed Dr. Humphrey to talk himself out on his own lines, and then, turning to him a brilliant but enigmatical face, opened this remarkable dialogue:

VIRGINIA. — All you have recommended, doctor, would no doubt be the right thing for any other invalid. But I doubt if ever a woman came to you with just my ailment.

DR. HUMPHREY (*smiling superciliously*). — Patients naturally suppose their own cases to be unique, my dear madam. Allow me to assure you I treat about two hundred and fifty women with your complaint every year.

VIRGINIA. — Precisely, doctor. It is not the complaint but its causes that are unique.

DR. HUMPHREY. — I do not need to inquire into the causes of nervous disorder. The results are apparent —

VIRGINIA (*interrupting*). — Doctor, I am going to confide in you. Be good to me. I will tell you the causes of my ill-health, because without your coöperation I can do

nothing. Your nurses would simply treat me as a lunatic.

DR. HUMPHREY. — Overwork, I suppose; insufficient rest, unsuitable food, too many children, poor help —

VIRGINIA. — All that is secondary. There is a secret cause, doctor, which even my husband does not know.

DR. HUMPHREY (*uneasily*). — I beg you, madam, not to be led into making any disclosures which you may afterwards regret. I can treat you without any confidences.

VIRGINIA (*looking at him in surprise*). — You may be sure I have weighed the matter fully. A woman does not tell lightly a life-long secret.

DR. HUMPHREY (*nervously*). — If you are perfectly sure that telling me will help the matter —

VIRGINIA. — If I were not sure, I would not tell you. . . . Doctor, have you happened upon a certain fugitive writer, whose articles have made from time to time quite a stir, chiefly because no one knew who *Erith Penrose* might be?

DR. HUMPHREY (*jumping up*). — Of course I have. I recollect the sketches perfectly.

VIRGINIA. — I am *Erith Penrose*. But my secret goes deeper than that, otherwise

it would not be killing me by inches; my husband does not even know I care for literature.

DR. HUMPHREY (*amazed*). — Impossible! And why not?

VIRGINIA. — You are a Northern man, doctor, and it may be difficult for you to comprehend. In the South it is not — well, not quite desirable for a woman to write.

DR. HUMPHREY. — But good God, madam! *Erith Penrose!*

VIRGINIA. — Yes, I understand. But no one else would understand in Provincialatis.

DR. HUMPHREY. — I beg your pardon. Where did you say?

VIRGINIA (*severely*). — Provincialatis. You do not know the South, doctor, or you would know Provincialatis.

DR. HUMPHREY. — But why must Provincialatis be consulted?

VIRGINIA (*with energy*). — It must not. It must never know. It is my home, doctor, and even if there were no one else to consider, I myself would be bound by the prejudices of the environment. They are my inheritance.

DR. HUMPHREY. — Humph! Isn't that just a little mediæval? Your gift is genius, you know.

VIRGINIA. — That is neither here nor there. The truth is, this propensity — genius you are pleased to call it — has been pent and hindered and suffocated until it is literally killing me. I have come here to write, doctor. Then I shall recover my health, you will see. But I have told you in confidence. You must promise me absolute secrecy.

The cast-iron methods of the "cure" physician are hard to break. But for once, be it said to Dr. Humphrey's credit, the régime relented. He continued to stare at his patient in amazement. Then he rang a bell.

"Send for Miss Barton," he commanded; and presently a quiet, intelligent-looking woman in nurse's cap and apron came into the room.

"Miss Barton, this is Mrs. Westmoreland, who is going to make her own cure. See that the quietest bedroom in the house is prepared, and supply her with unlimited stationery. She will be under your care, but she is to be left uninterrupted to do as she wishes until further orders from me. On no account let the nurses or doctors annoy her."

Then, as Miss Barton retired, he held out his hand and spoke like a man of heart rather than a man of science.

"Madam, I believe you may be right in

your diagnosis of your own case. I shall respect your secret and do all I can to further your plans."

And so, for the only time in its annals, the red-tape of the Institution was loosened; the trained system gave way, and Virginia Westmoreland was permitted to work out her own salvation in her own way. The frenzy of writing swept her at first like a tornado. It tore at the roots of her being; it bent and swayed her nature as a willow sapling is bent in a hurricane. She sent her work to a Boston publisher, and for the first time demanded payment. As fast as she could write, her dramatic sketches were seized upon and paid for liberally. The doctor stood by, and arranged through a suburban postman to have her mail fetched and carried incognito. She recovered her health at a bound. All the lovely color of her first youth came back, and her eyes shone with happiness. Then she grew more self-possessed, and the force of her writing became calmer, not less. In six months, the fountains of her being restored, all the well-springs of her intellect refreshed and sweetened by the overflow of long restrained rivers of emotion, she returned to Westmoreland house, and took up the old drive and worry and struggle, saying to herself bravely:

"Now I have said my say. I have emptied my soul of its bursting desire. Let me do my woman's duty humbly, to the end of my days." . . .

The increased disorder to which she had come back was appalling. Mary Culpepper's incapacity, backed by her indolence and John's indifference, had rendered the already run-down establishment a scene of confusion which smote Virginia on the first evening of her arrival like a blow in the face. At first her pecuniary success buoyed her up. For the fame she seemed to care nothing. She longed to tell her husband the whole story, and hoped he would ask for her bill of expenses. But with characteristic irresponsibility, he had forgotten all about the expenses. Then she said significantly:

"About the bills, John: I told you I thought I could pay for myself, and I did. Here are nearly a thousand dollars left over."

He looked at her a moment and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"So you've been speculating, have you? Your father's own daughter, Virginia, — and in the Nawth, too? Well, I reckon the money won't come amiss. That low-lived Yankee lawyer has been pestering me about the mortgage interest. And Fauquier seems uncommonly anxious for his money. I didn't know

a gentleman ever asked for his own money. But, Virginia, who'd have thought you'd take to gambling?"

"Oh, John," interrupted his wife half hysterically, "indeed it wasn't gambling. It was" —

The words died on her lips. Even had the existing prejudice been less than she thought (and very likely it was), still the traditions of her own bringing-up would have so worked against her as to paralyze her tongue from the self-accusation of being a blue-stocking.

If only it had been to-day! If only *Erith Penrose* had set her name to those thrilling, fiery snatches of pure and spontaneous literature in this year of our Lord 1898, when half the women of the South are waking up to essay dialect stories, even Provincialitis might have risen to do her credit! Are not even Mrs. Loudoun and Mrs. Leesburg — true Southern gentlewomen — striving (sur-reptitiously it must be admitted) to get into print?

But twenty-five years ago the literary leaven of the North had not lightened the Southern mass. As the vivid experience of the Sanitarium faded more and more from Virginia Westmoreland's mind, she fell back again hopelessly into a routine at once

maddening and exhausting to her peculiarly high-strung temperament.

And *Erith Penrose* was as though she had never been.

CHAPTER IV

ATTAINMENT

ANOTHER ten years have gone by, and increasing cares and illnesses, with an accumulation of debts and mortgages, have been added to the chaos of Westmoreland house. John Westmoreland has grown more careless, more indolent, more shabby; but he is still good-natured and jovial, and he still adores his wife. Virginia, still bearing all the burdens of her husband's shifting, has become incredibly older. Her hair is gray, her figure is broken, her once round and pretty cheek is wrinkled — at forty. A Northern woman at forty thinks herself young; or, rather, she does not think at all about her years, and continues to do the things which occupied and interested her in her youth. At forty, a Southern woman feels under obligation to relinquish the graces of her younger days. If she is still well-preserved and handsome, she wears her honors retiringly, as though apologetic for

the hold she retains upon social success. But all that pertains to youth and success has slipped from Virginia Westmoreland's grasp. If she was bowed by her burdens, her cares, her economies, at thirty, at forty she is crushed by them. All the sweet joyousness of the Southern nature is extinct. The light of her genius has gone out. The strained eyes and drawn mouth are exaggerated tenfold.

"If only I might have gone back to the Sanitarium — just once more!" she thinks to herself. But the horror of that home-coming to a wrecked establishment is ever before her. From the mire of it, the poor bedraggled fortunes of Westmoreland house have never quite emerged. Two of her children are invalids: little Gwendolin has lung trouble and Teddy is a cripple. No, she could never again have left them; never have made another brief escape. . . .

And so the secret, silent panic of a divided existence, a strained and broken predilection, goes on. Then Virginia Westmoreland breaks down suddenly, and is seen no more in the midst of the accustomed effort she had called her life.

A belated baby has come, wailing, to the shabby Westmoreland nursery. As Virginia lies white and spent, with the puny little

creature on her arm, she looks long and wistfully into the tiny crumpled face.

VIRGINIA. — John, I should like you to call this poor little baby Erith Penrose, will you?

JOHN. — Why, of course, Virginia, if you want it. But where on earth did you get such an odd name?

VIRGINIA (*dreamily*). — I heard it once — a long while ago.

JOHN (*doubtfully*). — I hope it isn't a Nawthern name.

VIRGINIA. — No, it isn't a Northern name. There was a young girl called Erith Penrose, who wrote, once upon a time, and died, and was forgotten.

JOHN. — Well, Virginia, she shall be called anything you like. It's a pretty name enough, though I never heard it down here.

No vague memory of that starlike fame which shot across the horizon troubles John Westmoreland's easy-going mind. Virginia sighs gently as she presses the frail little form to her bosom, with that agony of renunciation known only to a mother who feels that she is about to be taken from her helpless infant. But God sometimes tempers the wind. And there is deep thankfulness in Virginia's soul, buffeted by its last storm, when the little creature, who bore for a few




weeks her forgotten fugitive name, is carried from her tired arms to the churchyard.

She lies day after day in the upper chamber, strangely, vaguely unconscious of the continuous riot below stairs. The noises of the demoralized household scarcely seem to reach her ear, which is beginning to harken for things eternal. The sight of her children, their arms about her, is an exquisite happiness which she is too weak physically to understand. The presence of her husband is a strange rapture for which she cannot account. The lurid battle of contending elements has rolled away from her soul and left only a white peace. All this is written upon a face made suddenly beautiful, like the face of a child.

John Westmoreland is in despair. In one of his momentary feats of rousing himself, he sends for the Sanitarium doctor who had once before so marvellously cured his wife.

When Dr. Humphrey stands unannounced before her, Virginia betrays no surprise, and John leaves physician and patient alone together. She holds out a transparent hand, and once more their spirits meet.

VIRGINIA. — How kind you are, doctor! You were always good to me. How did you know I was ill?



DR. HUMPHREY. — Your husband telegraphed me, Mrs. Westmoreland.

VIRGINIA. — Did he? Dear John, he is so thoughtful! But it is too late this time, doctor.

DR. HUMPHREY. — It is never too late. I will take you back with me. We will let you save yourself as you did once before.

VIRGINIA. — Oh, Dr. Humphrey, don't remind me of that time! It all seems like some strange, fantastic delusion. Promise me you will never, never — even when I am dead — divulge the secret of *Erith Penrose*.

DR. HUMPHREY. — But, my dear Mrs. Westmoreland, consider the fame you are throwing away. It is fame you have won, real fame, an astounding fame. For God's sake, rouse yourself and take the cure once more!

VIRGINIA (*smiling into his eyes*). — It has all left me, doctor, that pent-up rage for expression. I could not write now, even at the Sanitarium.

DR. HUMPHREY (*bluntly*). — Because you have let yourself be trampled to death in the cruel exigencies of sordid every-day things.

VIRGINIA. — They were my life, those every-day things. They were the hourly needs of my husband and children. After

all, doctor, I love my husband and children better than — the other existence.

DR. HUMPHREY (*in a choked voice*). — Madam, you have been sacrificed. You are a rare woman who should have been spared all these brutal conditions.

VIRGINIA (*still smiling*). — No, doctor. I am only a woman who has tried to do her duty, and been forced to give up the struggle.

1875

**THE UPPER AND THE NETHER
MILL-STONE**



THE UPPER AND THE NETHER MILL-STONE

CHAPTER I

"**YOU** are in no end of luck. I wonder if you half appreciate your good fortune?"

"Look here, Jack. Do you suppose I don't know the difference between putting up with any sort of place the Bishop can find me—second assistant in some third-rate down-town parish, which means work in an auxiliary district or mission chapel—and this splendid offer?"

Wilmer Day's eyes were shining with gratitude and satisfaction. He saw a brilliant prospect unexpectedly opening before him, just as he had taken orders, only a year from the time of completing his course at the Seminary.

"Well," said Jack, otherwise John Plunkett, helping himself to another cigarette which he smoked ruminatingly, "it's the best opening I ever heard of: church newly remodelled,

parish well off, — though I can't for the life of me see why a Northern man should get it."

"It is said to be supported chiefly by a rich old lady named Plymouth," interposed Day.

Plunkett stared.

"Plymouth in the South? Isn't that rather an anomaly?"

"So it strikes me. I fancy she's an importation. Of course, it is she who wants a Northern man. Doubtless it is entirely to her I owe my call to Provincialitis."

"Any relation?"

"I never heard of her before. But you know what these elderly churchy women are. They keep the run of every young fellow who takes orders."

"To continue the enumeration of your future blessings," proceeded Plunkett, "there's a perfect climate, an excellent salary, nobody to meddle with your parish, and, above all, any quantity of handsome women to adore yourself."

"Why handsome?"

"Oh, nearly all Southern women are handsome. If they're not, they're so captivating that you think them good-looking, which amounts to the same thing. You'll be a "Reverend Idol" in no time."

Here a quick knock at the door was followed by the entrance of a second young divine who had come to offer his congratulations to the fortunate future rector of St. George's.

"Of course, it's a magnificent thing, Day, if you can get along with the old lady."

"What do you know of the old lady?" asked Day, interested.

"Haven't you heard the joke? Capital! To think of being first to tell a man the latest bit of humor in his own parish that-is-to-be. Well, the old lady — I won't mention her name" —

"Plymouth," said Wilmer Day.

"Oh, so you've heard the joke?"

"No, excepting that they call her the Rock."

"Well, she runs the parish, you know."

"So I have heard. Is that the joke, Bryant?"

"Not in its entirety. It seems you are not the first clerical fledgling who has received a call to St. George's. Henry Halifax was invited to fill the pulpit on trial last summer during vacation. He comes from down there, but had the misfortune to be recommended by the vestry instead of chosen by the Rock. That won't apply in your case, however, as you are her discovery.

"To continue, Halifax is a little high in his notions, you know, and was not prepared beforehand, as I'm preparing you, about the Plymouth prejudices."

"He's a rank ritualist," interpolated Wilmer Day.

"Just so. Well, it seems the old lady is not quite so rank, in that fashion. The first Sunday, he went along very smoothly, not intoning a particle, but merely preserving that dead level twang of his which can pass equally for a chant or a cold in the head; you recollect it?"

"Of course. Go on."

"The next Sunday he began to rise a little, not obtrusively, but surreptitiously. The pretty girls looked immensely impressed and were in quite a flutter."

"Oh, come, how do you know?"

"My instinct for telling a good story informs me. It wouldn't be dramatic without. The old lady didn't suspect him" —

"I wish you would be less dramatic and come to the facts, Bryant."

"If you interrupt me again, I'll quit before I get to the point. Well, he was enormously popular with the pretty girls. He kept on rising in a ritualistic way each Sunday, always beginning moderately and going up gradually. The old lady never showed a sign of

disapproval. She must be a clever one, Day. You'll have to look out.

"Finally, one morning, when Halifax had got pretty confident and just about reached the highest pitch of intoning, he undertook to begin at the altitude where he had left off the Sunday previous.

"The Plymouth Rock sat in her accustomed pew directly under the reading-desk (she's a little deaf, you know) when the Rev. Henry Halifax struck up in his most exaggerated soprano key:

"‘The Lord *be* with you,’ dropping a half-octave on the ‘be,’ and getting back to the key note at a jump.

"The old lady rose solemnly, and, elevating her voice to precisely the tune, drop-in-the-middle and all, responded:

"‘And — you — *don't* — say so.’"

A roar of laughter from John Plunkett, echoed by the Rev. Wilmer, prevented any further elaboration of the episode that had finished his predecessor's career at Provincialis, and he went forth to his new parish thanking the Lord devoutly that he was not subject to the temptations of the ritualist.

"Good-by and good-luck," said Plunkett, parting with his friend at the railroad station. "Write me about the pretty girls. You'll soon be captured for life by the best of the lot. I envy you, old fellow."

The young man's heart was beating high with confidence and hope.

"I'll have you down to taste the hospitality of the South," he called back as the train started him to his new home.

CHAPTER II

PROVINCIALATIS is, as it was a decade ago, an exceedingly ancient town, as antiquity goes in this New World. It is also an aristocratic place, as aristocracy goes, of course. Its location is sufficiently Southern to obtain the prestige of those unimpeachable "first families" one used to hear so much about before the war. It is beginning to enlarge its borders somewhat, and to gather in outsiders with its growing population. But the new resident, who regards its exclusive precincts from the wrong standpoint, is a foregone failure in the social world. All this Wilmer Day had not yet discovered. Therefore he approached the situation frankly, with a mind unbiased by any doubt.

Three months had gone by since he had taken possession at St. George's. At first he was delighted with everything and only regretted that his congregation was a little distant, or shy, or difficult; or what was the

slight chill which struck his sensitive spirit as quite unlike the warm Southern welcome he had anticipated?

His preaching had been appreciated, and pronounced by Provincialatis "quite above the average." His duties as pastor had been energetically performed among rich and poor. But among rich and poor alike, instead of overcoming the baffling reserve, he found it growing more marked. The vestrymen who took every opportunity to congratulate him upon his brilliant sermons went no farther. No one, save Miss Plymouth, followed him up with week-day attentions. She made much of him in her dry, sarcastic fashion. But Miss Plymouth was not one of the gentry. She was accepted on sufferance by Provincialatis only because she was too rich and important to be left out.

"I'll give twenty-five thousand dollars to the church, Mr. Day, if you marry Betty Fauquier," she once said, looking keenly at him with her unpleasant beady eyes. Betty Fauquier was heiress to "Stonewall," the great place of the neighborhood.

"But, my dear Miss Plymouth," responded the young man, "how should I ever aspire to Miss Betty, charming as she is? I scarcely know her."

"All same, it will be greatly to the advan-

tage of the parish if you marry her, in spite of the Fauquier pride," snorted Miss Plymouth.

Mrs. Fauquier gave the new rector very little opportunity to consider Miss Plymouth's proposition. She used every pretext to keep Betty from attending service, and never permitted her at any of those small church affairs so delighted in by rural parishes. Nor was Mrs. Fauquier the only matron who guarded her daughters from the attractive stranger's possible intentions.

"It is very strange," said the Rev. Wilmer to himself, for living alone he had no one else to talk to, "it is very strange, but I certainly think Mrs. Culpepper intended not to see me to-day. There was that in her eye which betokened conscious avoidance. No woman turns her head entirely around when she looks in at a shop window, unless she intends only the back of her bonnet to be recognized."

Here there was a tap at the study door.

"Well, Mrs. Warrington, what is it?"

The drooping form of the housekeeper, also housemaid, also waitress, trailed its dingy black garments into the room.

No one but a Southern lady in very reduced circumstances could have assumed the melancholy countenance and mournful man-

ner habitually worn by Mrs. Warrington, whose very act of entering a room had the effect of a flood of tears. She also wore an air of continuous disapproval, which was trying to a man of the rector's cheerful temperament. Her voice was like a suppressed sob when she spoke:

"Mr. Day, the vestry has sent word that it cannot hold a meetin' here this evenin'."

"Cannot hold a meeting! Why not?"

Mrs. Warrington looked doubly reproachful.

"The message did not say why not, Mr. Day. Mr. Loudoun's boy brought it. He came trampin' over my clean steps with his muddy feet. He gave no particulars."

The Rev. Wilmer turned perplexedly to his table, and taking up a volume of "The Other Life" tried to bury his discomfort in its pages.

Fresh from the tonic breezes of the North, the new rector found something inexpressibly soothing in the inconsequential dreaminess which pervaded the town. He had a preconceived notion that his parishioners were of the clinging nature which would fasten seductively upon his affections. In anticipatory response, his heart went out to them at once. It was all delightfully primitive, almost

mediæval. The want of enterprise, slowness of business methods, and general small-towniness were features greatly prized as "conservative" by the inhabitants. All this added to the aristocratic air of the place; and Wilmer Day entered into the spirit of the environment with a wonderful capacity for forgetting the great literary and business centre whence he had come. One thing worried him considerably, however, although the Provincialists took it as a matter of course. The whole vicinity was flooded (if so clean a metaphor may be applied to anything so unfailingly dirty) with negroes. The streets were black with them; the air was thick with them; they were suggested by every breeze; they obstructed every view. For the most part they were idle, shiftless, and without visible occupation or apparent means of support. Their condition seemed neither to curtail the numbers of their progeny nor the exuberance of their animal spirits. This meaningless hilarity of the darkey was an offence to the Rev. Wilmer Day. It grated upon his nicely adjusted sense of propriety, like the antics of so many obtrusive apes. To him, there seemed a tone of aggressive impertinence in the perpetual "yah, yah," of the childish, unreliable black, which was not only tolerated, but

apparently enjoyed, by their Southern masters and mistresses.

It took all the practical Christianity he could muster to enable him to say: "Somewhere, in some expurgated world, this baboon-like creature will be my brother."

But in this world he wanted none of him; for which reason Mrs. Warrington, reduced gentlewoman and housekeeper by courtesy, was compelled to serve her employer with her own helpless hands, keeping the cook an unseen functionary in the kitchen beyond. The icy tone of unappeasable reproof which her soft Southern voice had managed to assume when she said acidly: "Northern people are incapable of appreciatin' the good qualities of the colored race," was the first warning note that struck the rector, of condemnation to come. He was a man prone to be very careful about expressing contrary opinions. Not to give offence was one of his life doctrines, both from Christian principle and a sense of courtesy. In his dealings with the congregation at St. George's he was fully prepared to wear the velvet mittens demanded by society. But society drew back and questioned. All his fine qualities and manly virtues could not save him from the working of an unwritten law which social prejudice had laid as a barrier between his people and

himself. In vain was he tall, handsome, well-bred. In vain was he intelligent; clever, cultivated. In vain was he a gentleman from the tips of his refined fingers to the toes of his patent leather shoes. Provincialitis weighed him in the balance against a single drop of its own provincial blue blood, and found him wanting. What was it to Provincialitis that a long line of irreproachable Days carried his ancestry back through Colonial dignity and importance to a noble family that claimed kings and queens as cousins? Among the records of the Westmorelands and Fauquiers, the Henricoes and Culpeppers, the Halifaxes and Jerolds and Shenandoahs, there was no such family as Day. Therefore the name of Day was not written in their Book of Life.

It must not be supposed that this sectional prejudice was a remnant of the war. It was a heritage from the Colonies, an antagonism of unlike peoples, different in aims and destinies from the beginning.

"He's an exceedingly handsome man," said Miss Betty Fauquier wistfully; "and awfully clever, and has very good manners — for a Yankee."

"Nevertheless, my dear," responded her stately mother, who could be very positive in spite of her soft ways and indolent voice, "I won't have you inviting him in to tea."

CHAPTER III

THE fire department of Provincialatis gave the new rector more concern than any other of its old-established institutions. It consisted of an obsolete engine, hook-and-ladder and hose carriage. They were run without steeds, unless a horse or two happened to be passing conveniently near, when they were promptly detached from their legitimate vehicles and compelled to do service at the fire. But for the most part the engine and its accompanying paraphernalia were seized upon and propelled by impromptu negroes, hundreds of whom swarmed hilariously from every quarter at the first alarm.

The rectory was situated in a main street, not far from the building occupied by this volunteer fire company. The first time an exodus of these necessary vehicles occurred after his arrival at Provincialatis, he rushed bare-headed into the street, believing that an earthquake had shaken the ground and rent the walls about him.

He was even more dazed at the spectacle he beheld. The under-stratum of Provincialatis (a black under-stratum) had heaved up and was pouring a reeking, unhindered tide,

from east and west, from north and south, through the town. And as the mass oozed and overflowed, it howled and howled again. For an instant there darted through his mind something he had read about darkey superstition, and their not infrequent panics in reference to the Day of Judgment. The situation being explained by Mrs. Warrington, Wilmer Day returned to his work. But his peace for that evening was gone. No sooner had the yelping mob ceased to surge one way than it was disgorged backwards, this time with guffaws of laughter instead of excited yells.

"Well, what is it now?" asked the Rev. Wilmer patiently, once more standing in the street from sheer inability to continue his studies.

"Lawd, pa'son," roared a huge darkey, "we done got fooled dat time, sure. 'Twar nuffin' but a red an' yaller sunset we done tuk fer an' almighty big fire."

Upon another occasion the alarm appeared to point to the rectory, and in spite of denials and expostulations, commands and threats, the Rev. Wilmer's domicile was overflowed by the same irresponsible human element. His carpets were trampled, his furniture was broken, his walls were besmirched, his papers were deluged. Finding nothing

to suggest a fire, the volunteer company retired in hilarious disorder, convinced that "hit suddany must ha' been some fool nigger give dat ar' 'larm."

He could have borne these minor discomforts, however, if the heart of Provincialitis had been with him. But he felt more and more that, for some unknown cause, he was an alien among those he sought to make his own by the ties of friendship as well as pastoral influence.

One day he met Betty Fauquier face to face and stopped her before she had time to make her escape.

He held out his hand frankly and she laid hers in it with a quick, half-frightened gesture.

"Miss Betty, we have always been good friends, haven't we?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mr. Day, very."

"And I have never said or done anything to make you think less well of me?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Day, never."

"Then will you tell me, as a friend, if the people here really like me? Sometimes I feel that there is an undercurrent against me; a something I do not understand. Is there?"

Poor Betty turned very red and began to tremble.

"Do you all dislike me, Miss Betty?"

His voice was very gentle, and had the

magnetic tone that always touched Betty Fauquier to the quick.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried helplessly. "It isn't that! We all like you; we admire you, Mr. Day, but" — and bursting into a passion of tears, she fled, leaving the rector gazing after her in the street.

Wilmer Day had read a great deal about the cordiality of the South, and it must be confessed he was more and more surprised to find that the wide Southern doors did not swing open hospitably at his urgent appeal.

At only one house, besides those of the University professors (for Provincialatis is in a mild way a university town), was he freely made at home. "Tivoli," the old Colonial mansion which had been purchased by Miss Plymouth, welcomed him at all hours, and its mistress sought to throw in his way many opportunities to court the maiden she had selected for him. But there was that quality in the rector's honor which forbade his taking advantage of the girl's youth and susceptibility.

Miss Plymouth had more money than all the rest of Provincialatis put together. It was she who had built the rectory, and offered to pay the rector's salary, provided she might select her man. She was not personally popular; perhaps it would be better to say that

she was not genuinely liked. But wealth is power, and the wealthy spinster did so many delightful things with her money that she was allowed to play a certain superficially popular rôle. It was a great pity that the aristocratic Provincialatins had to be beholden for the handsomest dances, the finest lawn-fêtes, the most *récherché* luncheons, to a Nobody from Nowhere. But she alone could command the great rooms and halls, the lawns and groves, of "Tivoli," whose rightful owners had never been able to retrieve the fallen fortunes of war. There was ingenuity, even a certain spitefulness, in the Rock's methods of entertaining. She liked to feel that a covert sting went with her hospitalities. Once — But that is too long a story to tell here. And still the polite world went, under protest; and there the polite world met and bowed graciously to the Rev. Wilmer Day, about whom Miss Plymouth got it rumored that he was likely to inherit the bulk of her fortune. The polite world also attended St. George's, that being more a matter of conscience than the invitations to "Tivoli." There they were compelled to listen courteously while the rector had them at a disadvantage. Betty Fauquier listened more than courteously. She was secretly fascinated with the new-comer's handsome face and manly

bearing, and suffered untold pangs of regret at her mother's ultimatum. The two pretty daughters of Mrs. Leesburg were more open in their admiration. Jaquelin began by declaring herself a champion of the rector; and Esther assumed huge undertakings in looking after the poor of the parish. Their efforts, however, proved too weak to stem the stealthy current. And one of the first distinct stabs which Wilmer Day received consciously was when sweet Jaquelin Leesburg (who, had she dared, would have made him that Reverend Idol prophesied by Jack Plunkett) turned her eyes away with a distressing blush when the rector came out after service one afternoon and asked if some of the young ladies would not help him organize a guild for the working girls of the parish.

He looked at her with puzzled inquiry, unwilling to credit the evident purport of her confusion. What did it all mean? What had Betty Fauquier's "but" implied? Was he an infatuated idiot who had been unable to see the actual attitude of these people towards himself? Had Mrs. Leesburg and her daughters only begun to eye him askance, or had they all been against him from the beginning? Why had Betty Fauquier crossed the street to avoid his bow that morning? And why had Mr. Loudoun, one of his vestry-

men, fallen back when he was intending to accost him? Had it all been like this from the first, and he alone been blind? And what had he done to antagonize these people?

Wilmer Day was a plucky man and a proud one. But a sense of helplessness swept over him, because of the very ignorance of his position. He had excellent balance, and generations of self-respect back of him, that made it almost impossible to accept humiliation. So he resolved to test indisputably the parochial pulse. He consulted not a soul. He did not even ask Miss Plymouth to stand by him, as a man without womenkind of his own should have done. Alone, he issued invitations for a reception at the rectory. He had caterers down from a near city, and all the delicacies of the season stood in readiness for two hundred guests. When the eventful evening arrived, and the rectory waited garnished with roses and palms for the feast, of the two hundred guests bidden came barely two dozen — the University people and Miss Plymouth. Showers of cards represented the first families, and the obsequious crowds that always follow their betters. In spite of vials of wrath, in spite of dire consequences threatened, Miss Plymouth had not been able to muster a single accepting soul

from all that "regretting" multitude. Betty Fauquier had shed mutinous tears, and Mrs. Leesburg's pretty daughters had been in open revolt. But the guestless host could not know of those faintly mitigating circumstances.

A man of less nerve might have been crushed on the spot. But Wilmer Day had not come from the North for nothing. He bore himself superbly, standing straight, and tall, and handsome, in his empty rooms, talking with elegant ease to his handful of startled guests, and meeting the situation with cordial grace.

The congregational apologies were accepted with perfect good-breeding. But the irony of his surroundings had suddenly grown tragic. As he went to bed that night, he realized for the first time in his life the painful uncertainties of the ostracized. While he laughed bitterly at Fate, recalling his confident invitation to Jack Plunkett to come down and help him enjoy the cordiality of the South, he also suffered keenly, as a man so placed was bound to do.

After the dead failure of his kindly social scheme had rudely awakened him from his lingering dream of future possibilities, he went about his parish duties with eyes newly opened to the more refined rebuffs offered

him. Before the week was over, he was convinced that but one path lay open before him, and that was the ignominy of retreat before veiled foes who had given him neither fair play nor open fight. Things culminated rapidly. The University men and their wives, who were not Church people, were the only ones that greeted him without embarrassment. And yet, he had so warm a heart, so generous a spirit, he so loved his fellow-being, that slowly, agonizingly, it was forced upon him, at last, that he — Wilmer Day — was despised; that all his good feelings towards these people had gone for naught; that his efforts to please, alike in parlor and pulpit, had not counted him one iota against some incalculable weight of unconscious offence. For his self-respect's sake it behooved him to take his departure. He went to call upon Miss Plymouth to inform her, first of all, of his intention. She at least was loyal and true. She was his friend.

The Rock listened silently until he had finished the few guarded remarks he permitted himself to make. He paused for her sympathy and indignation. Then she said, looking critically at him with her hard, bright little eyes:

"So it's come at last, has it? I only wonder you've held out so long, Mr. Day."

"Come at last? Do you mean to say you expected it, Miss Plymouth?"

"Of course I expected it. It's what I had you down for."

Wilmer Day's face grew white to the lips under the cut of this unlooked-for lash. He rose with a dignity that even Miss Plymouth, who respected nothing and nobody, could not but admire.

"Am I to understand that you induced these people to give me the call to St. George's to humiliate me?"

"Oh, dear, no, Mr. Day; not you. I didn't care anything about you — before I met you, I mean. I wanted to humiliate them."

"And how — why?" he gasped, still unable to grasp the situation. "Why should I be chosen as a scourge for this community?"

"It's strange you haven't understood," she said sharply. "You must have a very unsuspecting nature, or you'd have found out at the start," began Miss Plymouth.

But the Rev. Wilmer interrupted sternly: "What were your reasons, Miss Plymouth?"

The spinster shifted her position uneasily.

"Well, for one thing, they insisted upon having that little fool Henry Halifax here last summer, because he is one of themselves."

He waited, still pale with anger, for her to continue.

"For another, I had a score to settle on my own account. They hate me because I'm a Northerner. I wanted to cram another Northerner down their maw."

"And you dared" — his eyes were like lightning in their wrath — "to use a minister of God to carry out a private revenge?"

She nodded her head, quaking a little before his anger.

"You inveigled a man whose mission is to do good to his fellow-man into a trap, that he might be compelled to do harm?"

"It wouldn't have come to that, Mr. Day," interrupted the old lady, "if it hadn't been for their disgraceful prejudices."

"Madam," said the Rev. Wilmer Day, "but for your gray hairs I would denounce you to your face for this miserable, cowardly plot."

"I didn't mean it to end in a tragedy," muttered the Rock; but the rector heeded her not.

"You knew their prejudices; you knew also that I was ignorant of them. You were quite prepared to bring about this cruel and wicked thing which has happened. I have written a letter of resignation to the Vestry which they will receive to-morrow. I have

declined to receive a dollar of salary for the six months of mistaken work, done to the best of my ability in this parish. And I shake from my feet the dirt of your false hospitality, the only hospitality offered me in Provincialatis."

Even the Rock was moved.

"I am uncommonly sorry, Mr. Day, I am indeed. I — I forgot to consider you in the matter. I wanted to punish them. I didn't think a clergyman could be so brave, so much of a man" — She began to whimper, while Wilmer Day stood and glared down upon her. "Won't you forgive me? Won't you shake hands with me, Mr. Day?"

"Miss Plymouth," and his voice had that sad break which is the sign that a man, in spite of all his courage, is really crushed, "I forgive you. As a preacher of my Master's Gospel on earth, I cannot do otherwise. But I really do not see that either Christianity or courtesy compels me to touch your hand."

He stopped at the rectory only long enough to gather up his papers and pay Mrs. Warrington for her services. When he said "Will you be kind enough to pack my books and clothes and send them after me?" he saw by the smothered gleam in her faded eye that she too was saying to herself:

"So it has come at last. I only wonder you've held out so long, Mr. Day."

On his way to the station he encountered the usual lazy stream of idle darkeys, and reflected with a self-accusing pang that not one of all those worthless creatures was held in so poor esteem as himself.

All that he ever said in answer to John Plunkett's silent yet sympathetic query was this:

"It wouldn't work, old fellow. When a man even unwittingly has got transfixed between people and their prejudices, he is ground as between the upper and the nether mill-stone."

A LITERARY COTERIE



A LITERARY COTERIE

PART I

THE PRELIMINARY MEETING


WHEN Miss Plymouth had first come to Provincialtis, she looked upon the ways and means of that aristocratic place with a distinctly disapproving eye. The marvelous irregularities of cobblestone and curb ; the picturesque uncertainties of level in sidewalk and street ; the impossibilities of municipal drainage ; and the ill-smelling lamps sparsely provided for city lighting — were all offences in her eyes. To her ears, they cried to Heaven for amelioration. She had brought with her the Boston woman's unappeasable demand for reformation, and presently she went forth upon a crusade that met but cold response in the breasts of the first families. That an unknown female, with the aggressive name of Plymouth, should have come to Provincialtis at all was a disagreeable fact hard to forgive. That she should have

bought Tivoli, their own Tivoli, wherein none of themselves had the wherewithal to abide, — was little short of an indignity. But that this woman, who went about in the rain with short petticoats, instead of driving in such sumptuous style as her unlimited means justified, — this woman who bounced into their presence, ignoring the stately manner and flourishing announcement customary with their dignified darkey butlers, — that *she* should undertake to reconstruct their long-valued methods, and overturn their long-standing prejudices, was an insult not to be tolerated.

In vain Miss Plymouth talked of the necessity of a street-cleaning force, offering to supply one-half the required funds. Her efforts were gently snubbed, herself was delicately cold-shouldered. Provincialatis did not approve of street-cleaning.

"They actually," she said to herself, in despair, "they actually prefer to leave their offal to those rank buzzards."

To her face they called her "My dear Miss Plymouth," and forbore to dispute. Behind her back they smiled, and called her "the Rock." And the street-cleaning never came to pass. But one point had been carried by the owner of Tivoli, to what end we have read in the crushing of the Rev.




Wilmer Day. Perhaps Provincialitis rather regretted that episode; and yet it would undoubtedly have been repeated had another young divine been vouchsafed them from the same source. Even if sent from Heaven they could not have accepted Wilmer Day, although, as Miss Plymouth delighted to remind them, his sympathy with what she called "the fictions of the South" had been unfailing. That incident had lasted the Rock for more than a year. But the fermenting of New England energies soon began again, and once more she went forth to work upon the conscience of the South. She assailed the social leaders one by one with an authority they failed to recognize.

To Mrs. Fauquier she said, "You women are undoubtedly frivolous." To Mrs. Jerold, "The Southern women lounge too much and eat too much." To Betty Fauquier, "The girls here are too vain, too ignorant, too flirtatious." To Mrs. Loudoun and Mrs. Leesburg she said, "You all dress too much and play cards too often." To Miss Girondelle she summed it all up, saying emphatically, "The woman of the South is indolent, helpless, uncultivated. She spends the valuable time given her for self-improvement in novel-reading and riotous living. She should begin to be self-supporting."

Provincialatis listened politely. Mrs. Fauquier and Mrs. Jerold and all the rest were gentlewomen of that exquisite grace which precludes both argument and contention. When Miss Plymouth used her most forceful language, which was very strong indeed when goaded on by her sense of duty to urge the advisability of cultivating the mind and reading other books than works of fiction, the ladies seemed to respond, as they had seemed to subscribe to the Rev. Wilmer Day. But no step was taken, and the Reformer was surreptitiously pronounced an unmitigated nuisance.

"If they would only argue fairly," said Miss Plymouth to herself, again in despair. "If they would only speak their minds, I might have a chance to convert them. I could combat any amount of objections; but this eternal acquiescence, which means nothing but bluff, is the most aggravating thing I ever had to deal with." Then to Mrs. Jerold: "You are a woman of some experience. Why don't you tell these people how behind the world they are on all the modern ideas of culture?" But Mrs. Jerold was not to be caught siding with the enemy. "Culture?" she said lazily. "Why, really, I think Provincialatis has an elegant culture of its own which is far superior to the



vulgar fads and the affected bookishness of Boston."

Miss Plymouth felt her spine turn cold with that sense of injury which comes of an unfairly met argument.

"Do you mean to say that playing cards, and flirting, and novel-reading constitute your idea of culture?"

"My dear Miss Plymouth," said Mrs. Jerold, letting her soft, dreamy orbs rest for a moment upon the restless, fiery eyes of her opponent, "I think we get the highest education from life, not from books. The beautiful repose of our Southern civilization is certainly nearer an ideal culture than the fussy, ever-changing theories of your modern educator."

The standard was high; the point of view incontrovertible. Miss Plymouth collapsed, not because she was beaten, not because she was in any way convinced, but because of the absolute impossibility of bringing Provincialitis to answer before any bar but its own assertions. However, she had a wonderfully determined will, and an immense amount of resistance. Not in a lost cause had her forefathers gloried in the name of Plymouth. And so the determination to bring about some sort of reform remained. She refused to accept the moral blight of an uncongenial reception. It seemed to her that she could

count upon one ally. In spite of sophistries, Mrs. Jerold was the one individual who appeared to take a real interest in the New Idea. She was a woman who lived somewhat outside of her narrow clique; and when it was proposed, at last, that at Tivoli should be held the preliminary meeting of a new Literary Club, Mrs. Jerold responded with almost effusive cordiality. Then Miss Plymouth walked her legs nearly off, and talked herself entirely hoarse, going from house to house among the *élite*, urging the importance of this first meeting. "Just to find out," as she put it, "how much raw material we can get together to work upon."

Now, Miss Plymouth should have known by instinct that the fine feelings of Provincialitis would recoil at being classed as mere commonplace raw material. How could there be anything raw about people with their ancestry? But Miss Plymouth had not a very keen perception of other people's fine feelings; and her instincts were wholly taken up with accomplishing a great purpose. It was with Miss Girondelle that she had the final tiff.

"Don't you reckon we are just as well off and a good deal less ridiculous without going in for all the absurd theories of the day?" said Lady Blanche.

"Nobody wants you to go into theories or absurdities," snapped Miss Plymouth, always ruffled by Lady Blanche's speeches. "You talk as though I wanted to force the Faith Cure, or Mental Healing, or some other delusion upon you. What you need is elevation, pure and simple. Why, in the North book-learning is universal, and a woman gets a fair education whether or no. In fact, she has to be pretty smart to keep out of it."

(Miss Plymouth pronounced it sma-art, which made Betty Fauquier giggle.)

"Really," said Miss Girondelle, subduing a polite smile, "it isn't considered just the thing in Provincialitis to be — smart. If I had wanted to be literary, and go in for science, and all that, when I was a girl at La Bordière, my father would have locked me up, and even now — Well, it isn't quite good form to be a blue-stocking, is it, Betty?"

Betty blushed delightfully. "Oh, dear, no! I think it would be dreadful. Mother says young girls should never express opinions. It isn't ladylike."

"And I think," added Miss Girondelle, "that here we imbibe the highest culture from our traditions and our surroundings. We do not require theories or sciences." However, with characteristic perseverance, Miss Plymouth insisted upon that prelimi-

nary meeting. The eventful afternoon arrived, and with it arrived — Mrs. Jerold's guest, Amy Caressa. She brought a pretty note from Mrs. Jerold, saying she was awfully sorry to have been unavoidably detained. No one else responded by a sign or a line, and the Rock swallowed her wrath only so far as to insist upon accompanying Miss Caressa back to the Jerold Mansion. Amy protested anxiously, entreating that they two might hold the meeting and arrange some plan of future action. But Miss Plymouth, who had for once pinned her faith upon Mrs. Jerold, was determined to follow up the delinquent. She went, expecting to catch the unavoidably detained lady of the house buried luxuriously in silk cushions and the last chapters of a new novel, having learned long since the value of her promised energies. But what was the consternation of the unexpected visitor to find the entire social circle of Provincialatis, herself only excepted, in the full and happy swing of an invited afternoon card-party! Out of commiseration, Amy Caressa had forfeited the pleasure.

Of course the vials of wrath were corked, and Miss Plymouth returned silently and swiftly whither she had come. But it was a long time before the subject of the Literary Club was again broached in Provincialatis.

PART II

CRITICISING THE DRAMATIC POEM

ALL that happened long ago. When Betty Fauquier giggled at Miss Plymouth's pronunciation of *sma-art* she was only sixteen, and now she is nearly twenty. Little by little the real kindness of heart at bottom of the Rock's superficial hardness has made itself felt in her adopted community. Those who are still unlike herself have come to believe that by some strange freak some good may come out of Nazareth.

Little by little, also, the edges of her demeanor have been worn off by contact with the softer surfaces — I do not say softer natures — with which she has chosen to cast her lot. The greatest gain which time has brought about is a smothered acknowledgment in Provincialitis of the desirability of culture. *Miss Plymouth has been asked to get up the Literary Club.*

Mrs. Fauquier, who had held out the longest, feeling it incumbent upon herself to represent the old *régime*, at last succumbs.

"We might tolerate the idea, Miss Plymouth, if you would not use the obnoxious

term 'Club.' We might organize it as a 'Sociable.'"

"That's too obsolete, even for Provincialitis," says Miss Plymouth quickly, and anarchy threatens again to reign, when Miss Girondelle's ready wit comes to the rescue.

"Why not call it a Literary Coterie? That sounds feminine and not too strong-minded."

"How charming!" cries Betty Fauquier. "No one wants to be thought strong-minded, of course. But, really, I should like to write a poem myself, only I wasn't born to be a genius." (She pronounces it "bawn," but so daintily that it is a pleasure to catch the soft sound.)

"Never you mind, my dear," says Miss Plymouth, wagging her head. "The cap of genius wouldn't be becoming to you and you can be as weak-minded as you like. We all know you were born only to be delightful — like Miss Girondelle. I am sure she will not want to write."

"I?" cries Lady Blanche. "I wouldn't write anything for a thousand dollars. I am above it."

"Then who will write our papers?" ask Mrs. Loudoun and Mrs. Leesburg, who have already felt the stirrings within, and secretly wish to be asked for the articles in question.

"I have a Dramatic Poem sent me by a youngwoman in Boston," says Miss Plymouth. "She will be our honorary member, and Miss Caressa will be our bright and particular star for the present, destined to read the Dramatic Poem at our first meeting. For a beginning, we will all constitute ourselves critics and discuss the paper."

It is arranged that the first meeting of the Literary Coterie be held at the Jerold Mansion. Miss Plymouth, remembering the fate of her preliminary meeting, wisely concludes that were the enterprise carried to Tivoli, even in triumph, it would never be taken hold of as a genuine Provincialatis institution.

During the intervening week the matter is much talked of in feminine circles. Strange as it seems to Miss Plymouth, the male members of Provincialatis society are to know nothing of the New Idea; for it is with a curious protest that those who desire to read, write, and learn up to the times have entered the hitherto tabooed field.

Fifteen years have gone by since Virginia Westmoreland gave up the silent secret of her literary life. The dignity of the new University, with its learned faculty and famous scholars, might have been expected to lend a literary tone to the society of the dear old town. But here the traditions of the old

South have asserted themselves. The new University, as a university, is all very well, and gives a certain prestige to the place; but the thoughts and habits of the first families are not yet to be turned by any innovations in the way of enforced book-learning, and the families of the professors have never been incorporated within the inner circle.

And, still, to Provincialitis — heretofore unpolluted by progress — has stealthily come an unacknowledged change. Down below the Mason and Dixon line has spread the restless thirst for things new and up to date. And the Southern woman's dread of the literary tone is fast becoming a merely negative indifference. Even the elect have fallen in guardedly and experimentally with Miss Plymouth's "Northern fad."

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Scene: A small but elegant reception-room in the Jerold Mansion, where the would-be literary women are assembled.

MRS. JEROLD. — The lady of the house, who travels a great deal and is looked upon as quite cosmopolitan.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — A charming woman, far from young, a permanent guest of Mrs. Fauquier, called Lady Blanche by those who love her.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — A Northern woman who lives in Provincialitis and who has inaugurated the New Idea.

MISS CARESSA. — An extremely clever young lady who aims equally at fashion and literature.

MRS. LOUDOUN AND MRS. LEESBURG. — Members of the Literary Coterie who have secret aspirations about getting into print, as a means of earning the pin money so sorely needed by the average woman in the South.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Mistress of Stonewall, and an unreconstructed aristocrat not reduced by the War.

MISS BETTY FAUQUIER and Others.

Miss Caressa (who is young and beautiful) has been reading with great dramatic effect the paper to be criticised.

MISS CARESSA (*subsiding gracefully into a chair*). — I am actually overcome. The power and passion of the whole thing have quite unnerved me. Did you ever know such a superb plot?

CHORUS OF VOICES. — Is it not wonderful! Is it not exquisite! How could she have done it? And she is so young!

MISS CARESSA. — She wrote it seven years ago — so Miss Plymouth says.

CHORUS. — You don't say so? And she is barely twenty-five!

MISS CARESSA. — She is nearer thirty-five. But that is young enough to have attained her literary reputation.

MRS. LEESBURG. — Do you mean to say that magnificent thing has been seven years unpublished?



MRS. LOUDOUN. — Because if it has, there is no use in any of the rest of us trying to get into the magazines.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Ladies, she has made no effort to publish it. She has two or three dramatic poems, and she intends to bring them out in book form.

MRS. LEESBURG. — You mean that she *hopes* to bring them out in book form.

MRS. LOUDOUN. — If the magazines don't want a thing the publishers won't look at it. They are all in collusion.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — "*Ca va sans dire.*" But were we not asked to criticise the poem? I like to cut things up, myself.

CHORUS. — Certainly, that is what we are here for.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Well, I for one suggest that the reference to Hebe is commonplace. There is no spice about Hebe. That line is unworthy of the situation, and of what goes before.

MRS. LOUDOUN. — So it is. The word "goddess" should be substituted. It would be more dignified —

MRS. LEESBURG. — And would cover more possibilities.

MISS BETTY FAUQUIER (*speaking timidly from the corner*). — Don't you think she uses the word "sweet" too often?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — I noticed that same thing. There is too much sweetness and light.

MISS CARESSA. — The drama certainly has a fine moral tone.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Doesn't it strike you as just a little *too* moral? It seems to me that a spice of wickedness adds a great deal to a dramatic situation.

MRS. JEROLD (*who goes to New York every winter to enjoy the theatres, etc.*). — It is only a parlor play, you know. It requires less immorality than a play which is to go on the boards. Suppose we try to get it up.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*sarcastically*). — Don't you think we had better criticise it first?

MISS CARESSA. — Don't you think it is too fine for a parlor play? I should call it rather a Drama of the Soul. No amateur could do justice to the noble and beautiful character of the Prince. Now, tell me, has any one here ever known a man who could play the part of the Prince?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Yes, I have.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — That is so like you, Lady Blanche. You are always ready, and the people you know are always ready. Now, if I knew people who could do nice things, I could never get hold of them.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Well, I didn't say I could get hold of this man, because he is

dead. He was the cleverest man I ever met, and the most charming. (*To Mrs. Jerold.*) Hetty, you know whom I mean. He was your admirer.

MRS. JEROLD. — He was yours more than mine, Blanche. He used to rave about you whenever he came to see me.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — And when he came to call on me, it was your fascinations he talked about. He used to read me French poems he had written about you.

MRS. JEROLD. — My dear Blanche, it was you he wrote them for; and Spanish ones, and Italian ones. Now confess that you have countless poems that he sent you.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Yes, stacks. But you had the real *dénouement*, after all. It was with you that he ran away.

MRS. JEROLD (*with dignity.*) — My dear, it was his horses that ran away with me. He was married by that time. You had known him for years before I was grown up, remember.

CHORUS. — Married? Whom did he marry?

MRS. JEROLD AND MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, we are not telling names. But she was a hundred years old and had a dozen children.

[Miss Plymouth raps sharply, but is unheeded.]

A LADY (*who has not yet spoken, jumping up and clapping her hands*). — Oh, I have it! I have it! I know whom you mean.

[Nods and winks exchanged.]

MRS. LOUDOUN. — Why on earth did he marry her when he might have had you two clever women?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — He couldn't have had me.

MRS. JEROLD. — He certainly could not have had both of us.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — I suppose he married the other woman because he was infatuated with her, neither of you charming women wanting him.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Nonsense! Of course he was infatuated with her. He was infatuated with any number of women.

THE LADY WHO KNEW ALL ABOUT IT. — Then why was it?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Propinquity, my dear.

MRS. LEESBURG. — But where were you?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, I was engaged to some one else just then.

MRS. LOUDOUN. — Lady Blanche, it is well we all know you. You talk as though you had always been engaged to half a dozen at once — like a female *roué*.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Why not say *rouette*?

That would make a feminine noun in French, and we are getting very French in our conversation. However, I should like to ask if the gentleman in question was as moral as he was clever?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, moral! What is moral? No one is really moral. I used to tell him — the Prince we'll call him — that it was a good thing I had never been tempted to do anything actually wrong; for I've never resisted a temptation in my life.

MRS. JEROLD. — Except the temptation to get married.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — That never really tempted me. I should have found the eternal and persistent attentions of one man intolerable.

[Miss Plymouth raps again, but is unheard in the babel of voices.]

CHORUS OF MARRIED WOMEN. — Well, *we* do not find their attentions either intolerable or persistent.

MISS CARESSA. — It seems to me that we have diverged a good deal. I thought we were wanting to find some one clever enough to take the part of the Prince. Or was it moral enough?

MRS. JEROLD. — I know plenty of moral men, but I don't think I know a really clever one.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — And I know plenty

of clever men, but I am not sure that I know a moral one.

CHORUS. — Oh — oh — oh — what an admission!

MRS. LEESBURG. — It is only a difference in the point of view.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Precisely. You mean that Mrs. Jerold, being moral, sees only that side of the question. While I — being merely clever —

CHORUS. — Ha — ha! That won't work either way.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Of course, you know I meant nothing of the sort.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Then what *did* you mean? That you are not moral, or that Mrs. Jerold is not clever?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — My dear Miss Plymouth, you Northern women are really too abstruse. I find I cannot follow your subtleties.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*rapping sharply*). — Ladies, don't you think we had better go back to our duty of criticising the drama we have just heard read?

MRS. LOUDOUN. — I should not dare to criticise anything so far beyond my ability to write.

MRS. LEESBURG (*with bitterness*). — The critic is not expected to have any ability to

write. His object is to try to prevent other people from writing.

MRS. LOUDOUN. — I thought that was the aim of the publishers.

MISS CARESSA (*sweetly*). — Do you find it so? My experience is that both critics and publishers are at times really encouraging.

MRS. JEROLD. — My dear Amy, that is because you have youth and beauty. Perhaps if you were fat, fair, and forty you would find them absolutely discouraging. I thank God daily that I never write.

[Enter maid with chocolate, wafers, bonbons, etc.]

CHORUS. — Oh, Mrs. Jerold! You are breaking the rules. You know this is positively forbidden by Miss Plymouth. But your chocolate is always irresistible.

[All sit around sipping chocolate, eating wafers, etc.]

MISS PLYMOUTH (*in despair*). — Ladies, if only you would try to keep to the point in question —

MISS CARESSA. — No — not yet. Do tell us more about the man who did not marry either of you two clever women. Of course you were horribly jealous of each other.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Not a bit of it. But his wife was horribly jealous of us both.

CHORUS. — Naturally. And what became of the wife?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — She died of old age, of course.

CHORUS. — Oh, how unromantic! And what did he die of?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — He died of delirium tremens, I reckon. I had lost interest in him by that time.

CHORUS. — But delirium tremens! How frightful! He would never have done for the Prince.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Well, you recollect I told you he was only clever, not moral.

MRS. LOUDOUN. — But do you *have* to make it as bad as all that? It isn't a bit of romancing, is it?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — It may all of it be fiction, you know. We may have been lying, Hetty and I, experimentally, just to see how it would work up in a plot.

MRS. LEESBURG. — Then I should never have the man die of anything so commonplace as delirium tremens. I should send him to a lunatic asylum, and have him die in a straight-jacket.

CHORUS. — You are always realistic, Mrs. Leesburg. That is too much like Zola. Why not have a romantic end to the situation?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Because the man lived, was clever (not moral, mind you), and

died in his own fashion. So we shall have to find some one else for our Prince.

MISS CARESSA (*sighing*). — What a pity! Because the men one knows are generally so tame.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*rapping*). — Ladies, this is not a society to promote gossip and annihilate men. Don't you think we really *ought* to do some work? Have we in any sense criticised the dramatic poem?

MRS. LEESBURG. — Not quite. What do *you* think of the plot, Miss Caressa? You seemed much moved by it when you had finished reading.

MISS CARESSA. — I? Oh, I have really forgotten the plot. Real life is so much more absorbing. I have become so awfully interested in the other man. It seems more tragic, you know.

MRS. LOUDOUN. — Why tragic? Because he died of delirium tremens?

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Or of a straight-jacket, in an asylum?

MISS CARESSA. — Oh, dear, no! Because he married the old lady with a dozen children, instead of — of —

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Of me.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*rising*). — Ladies, if you call this literary culture we had better adjourn.

(*Curtain Falls.*)

A MILD LUNATIC



A MILD LUNATIC

Place: "Stonewall," a fine old mansion near Provincialatis, where Mrs. Fauquier is having a house party.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — I never could endure poor relations. They fasten on one like family failings or an hereditary squint.

[Miss Girondelle has a spicy manner, and says things with an air which challenges listeners to deny that she is clever. The cleverness is accepted, it being true that most people are taken at their own valuation. Not even Miss Plymouth ventures to remind her of the fact that she is herself a poor relation.]

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Well, I really don't know about that. I never had any poor relations, or if I had they were killed in the War. But don't you reckon it might be rather amusing, just to see how they would go about getting what they could out of one, without being suspected, you know?

[The Provincialatis ladies pronounce the word "pore," but with so exquisite a modulation of the mellow Southern voice, and so delicate a cadence, that it sounds positively delicious.]

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, that is not the

way with poor relations. If they would confine their efforts to unsuspected machinations, one need not mind. It is the genius they have of appearing openly at the wrong time, and mortifying one by their importunities before the wrong people, that is most trying.

MISS CARESSA (*who always takes the part of the absent, in this case feeling it her duty to support even a supposed needy relation*). — Don't you think that to be poor and obscure is bad enough without being despised? And by the very people to whose superior comforts and coveted luxuries you feel yourself to have been equally born?

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Nonsense! People aren't born to anything in this plutocratic day and generation. If one's relations are poor, it is generally because they are shiftless and have acquired a faculty for not getting along. For my part I loathe them.

[The Rock sits up hard and unflinching, with a meaning glance directed nowhere obviously, but in reality levelled at Miss Girondelle.]

MRS. JEROLD. — You speak as though you had an army of them, Miss Plymouth.

[Mrs. Jerold, who is plump and luxurious, bears herself entirely above the commonplace concerns of every-day life; and also above the suspicion of needy connections, of whom, however, she has not a few whom she helps with true Southern lavishness and keeps hidden away in remote corners.]

MRS. LOUDOUN. — And as though they were all in pursuit of your income.

MRS. LEESBURG. — Or as though you had defrauded them and they were nagging at your conscience.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Ladies, spare me! I have not an army of pauper cousins. We never do up North. I have but two, and those I have not defrauded; on the contrary, they have sought to defraud me upon more than one occasion.

MISS CARESSA (*sighing*). — For my part I pity the indigent; it must be humiliating to be forever doing without things.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — I always feel like calling them the "indignant" poor. "Indigent" is so very negative a word. One wants an aggressive term for an aggressive class.

[Miss Plymouth sniffs significantly. The lady of the house, who is always well dressed and carries herself with dignity, looks complacently about the elegantly appointed morning-room, and down a vista of noble hall that ends in a brilliant bit of conservatory. Fine old family portraits smile back at her from the walls.]

MRS. FAUQUIER. — If I had any poor relations, I think I would invite them all here, one at a time, of course, and let them enjoy as much as possible such good things as have fallen to my lot.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — No, you wouldn't,

Agnes ; it would be too risky. You might pick out the most presentable and invite her—just once. That would end it. You would be mortified to death at her bad-fitting clothes.

MRS. FAUQUIER.—I should not let her wear bad-fitting clothes. I should see that she was well dressed.

MISS GIRONDELLE.—Then she would cry and say that you had insulted her. Besides, she would most likely have vulgar manners. Poverty lowers the tone, and degenerates into vulgarity.

MRS. FAUQUIER.—Pardon me, Lady Blanche. I believe I never had a relative who was vulgar. (*Mrs. Fauquier can be truly magnificent, on occasions.*)

MISS GIRONDELLE.—No, of course not. Because you never had one who was abjectly poor. We are only supposing a case. She would always sit in the parlor and tell her secret woes to your most casual callers.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*unable to restrain herself any longer*).—Seems to me the impecunious people I have met around Provincialatis have no notion of being abject. I guess they're not insulted at being asked to wear fine clothes.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*rising majestically and waving the subject aside with a sweep of her jewelled hand ; — the Provincialatis*

ladies always wear their jewels generously). — Well, as long as there is no such person, it is scarcely worth while to enter into minute details of possible discomfort. (*To Mrs. Jerold.*) What are you going to do this morning, Hetty?

MRS. JEROLD. — I? Oh, I never do anything. I have grown so fat that it is positively an exertion to think, to say nothing of action.

CHORUS. — Oh, Mrs. Jerold! You are not a bit too stout. You have just the right amount of — of —

MRS. JEROLD. — Tallow?

MISS CARESSA. — No, indeed; I was going to say "*embonpoint*."

MRS. JEROLD. — Yes, that does sound better, and really, you know, I am fat and forty only superficially. I feel quite young and slender, in a sentimental way.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — You are delicious, Hetty. No one would have a pound less of you for worlds, either superficially or sentimentally.

MRS. JEROLD. — Thank you, dear. You always say the right thing. Now, no one would take Miss Plymouth to be fifty, because she is not fat —

[Here a pompous darkey in livery enters and informs Mrs. Fauquier that a person wishes to speak to her.]

MRS. FAUQUIER. — A person? What is a person, Semms? Is it man, woman, or child?

SEMMS. — It is a ole pries', Mis' Agnes, I done reckon.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — A priest? How extraordinary! Let him come in.

[After a moment's parry in the hall the dark-key returns, saying that the person would like to see Mrs. Fauquier privately. She vanishes into the hall out of sight, in an opposite direction from the conservatory. Near the great front door stands the visitor, a tall, shabby, elderly man, pale as a ghost, and much stooped. His long hair falls in curiously unkempt gray locks upon his shoulders, and he holds a battered clerical hat in an unsteady hand. His coat gives the appearance of a clerical cut, from being long in the skirt and buttoned close up to the throat, with no visible collar. The lady advances respectfully.]

(Dialogue between the two.)

Good afternoon, father; did you wish to see me?

Yes, I thank you, I wished to see you.

[The father's voice is very gentle, his accents are peculiarly mild, and a strange contemplativeness is in his aspect.]

Won't you come in and sit down?

[Leading the way to a reception-room, opposite to the one occupied by the ladies.]

Yes, I will sit down. I thank you.

[He seats himself absently, and regards his hostess with a curious, dreamy stare.]

Can I do anything for you, father?

Yes, I thank you. You think I am a clergyman, I perceive!

[Mrs. Fauquier is confused.]

Your dress — isn't it clerical?

[The visitor raises his thin white hand to his throat dreamily.]

Ah, yes — I see — clerical. I have been taken for a priest before. Often — yes. The absence of linen. Thank you.

[Mrs. Fauquier now notices that his coat is threadbare and almost ragged. His boots are badly broken. Altogether there is an odd mixture of extreme poverty and extreme gentility about the man which is quite pathetic. She says to herself:]

He is evidently an impoverished gentleman of the old school. (*Aloud*). Can I do anything for you?

Can you do anything for me? Ah, yes — I see. You perceive my necessities. I thank you.

Would you like —

[Mrs. Fauquier stops, not knowing just how to proceed.]

Would I like —

[Echoes the guest, in his remote, intangible way.]

Thank you; yes.

I wonder if he is not a little cracked. (*Sotto voce.*)

[There is a moment's silence. While Mrs. Fauquier is trying to make up her mind whether to offer her guest money or food, he raises his soft, pensive eyes reproachfully to her face:]

determinedly). — See here, boss; the missus wants you to move along.

LUNATIC (*patiently*). — Move along? Thank you — yes — yes.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*indignantly*). — What shall I do? Semms is treating that poor, irresponsible creature as though he were a pickpocket.

SEMMS (*getting angry and taking hold of the clerical rags*). — Look heah, now, if yer don't get out of this mighty spry —

CHORUS. — Oh, Mrs. Fauquier, that ridiculous Semms is going to put the poor harmless creature out!

MRS. FAUQUIER (*shrilly*). — Semms! Semms!

SEMMS (*entering the hall*). — He jest won't move, Mis' Agnes. He's that onery an' obstreperous —

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Semms, have you no sense? First you let in a lunatic and then you try to put him out bodily. Don't you know crazy people have to be persuaded? Leave him to me. Go and call Uncle Marsh, and tell old Jerry to patrol the porch. If there is any danger, I wish to have protection.

[Exit Semms, bowing and spluttering. Great confusion reigns among the ladies, each of whom suggests that one of the others accompany Mrs. Fauquier into the reception-room to persuade the lunatic. Miss Girondelle having

most curiosity and Miss Caressa most compassion, finally allow themselves to be selected. After several attempts at crossing the hall, with backward flights at fancied noises, the ladies enter the room, clinging together. The gardener and coachman are seen stationed one at each side of the front door. The lunatic, whom they had half expected to see raging stealthily about the room, is sitting in a big easy-chair, his head resting on the high velvet back, his eyes closed wearily, and a sad, patient look upon his refined face. His long white hands (they are not clean hands, and the whiteness is probably due to ill-health) rest one upon each arm of the chair. Apparently he is asleep.

Mrs. Fauquier and Miss Girondelle exchange glances as though to read each other's frame of mind.]

MRS. FAUQUIER (*nervously*).—What shall we do? We can't leave him here.

MISS GIRONDELLE.—Wake him up, and I will try my magnetizing powers on him. Then let the coachman and gardener coax him away between them.

MRS. FAUQUIER.—Coax him away? My dear Lady Blanche, you have no idea how strangely he behaves. He does not seem to understand what is said—only to echo everything in the most dreamy and unpleasant way. Oh, I wish Mr. Fauquier were home!

MISS GIRONDELLE.—I don't. Men always spoil everything. They have no

finesse. Mr. Fauquier would very likely take him by the collar —

MISS CARESSA. — He has no collar, poor soul!

MISS GIRONDELLE. — And kick him out. Then I should have no chance to try my magnetizing powers upon him.

LUNATIC (*opening his soft eyes and looking calmly at the speaker*). — Excuse me. Try what sort of powers did you say, madam?

MISS GIRONDELLE (*taken aback*). — We were wondering — ah — if you would like something to eat?

MRS. FAUQUIER (*hastily*). — Yes, the gardener will give you a cup of tea, if you will go with him to the Lodge.

LUNATIC. — Ah, yes! The Lodge. Thank you.

[Leans head back and closes eyes again.]

MRS. FAUQUIER (*desperately*). — Perhaps you had better come at once. The tea will be — will be cold.

LUNATIC (*opens his eyes dreamily*). — Very cold.

[He regards Mrs. Fauquier's troubled face with a long, earnest gaze while the ladies confer in undertone.

Then he adds in his softly modulated voice :]
It must be — little Agnes!

MRS. FAUQUIER (*screaming faintly*). —

Oh, Blanche, what *does* it all mean? I am so frightened! Where is Semms?

MISS CARESSA. — My dear Mrs. Fauquier, you sent Semms away. Don't be worried. This poor man is perfectly harmless. He has got hold of your name somehow. That is all.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*bursting into tears*). — No, it isn't all. I feel that there is something dreadful back of it.

LUNATIC. — And you have really forgotten Andr-r-rew? But, of course, you must have been very young then — very young.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*whispering*). — Agnes, do you know I don't believe the man is crazy. I think he is putting it all on. He is an impostor, and I would call in the men, after all.

LUNATIC (*with dignity*). — Thank you. There is no need to call any one. If I am an unwelcome guest, I will go elsewhere. But (*faintly*) I am very tired, and — (*coughs feebly*).

MISS CARESSA (*whispering*). — Oh, Mrs. Fauquier, won't you offer him some luncheon? He looks very ill.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Hush! Amy. I don't dare encourage him. Only fancy a crazy person in one's very house — and Mr. Fauquier away! He must go at once. He shall be fed at the Lodge.

LUNATIC (*rising slowly and facing Mrs. Fauquier*). — Will you do me a favor — since you do not recognize me? Will you let me speak to your mother?

MRS. FAUQUIER. — My mother? I should think not. What should you know about — my mother?

LUNATIC (*making a tragic gesture with his thin hands*). Ask her — if you have any pity for the unfortunate — ask her if she, too, has forgotten Andr-r-rew.

[It would be impossible to reproduce the soft refinement of pronunciation with which the syllables are uttered.]

MRS. FAUQUIER (*passionately*). — I will go and ask her, just to prove you are an impostor. Wait!

[She hastens from the room, followed by the others, and locking the door takes the key.]

A few moments elapse, and there appears on the stairway a handsome elderly woman who hurries nervously down the steps and enters the reception-room by another door.

Chorus of excited voices in suppressed tones :]

What does it all mean? . . . Who is he?
. . . And what can he want? etc., etc.

[After a quarter of an hour of subdued panic in the morning-room, during which time the coachman and gardener are mysteriously withdrawn and Mrs. Fauquier remains above stairs invisible, Semms crosses the hall and enters the reception-room by a lower door, bearing a tray well filled with every luxury. In a half

hour more the guest had departed by another way.

Enter lady of the house, flushed, with well-feigned air of relief, and laughs nervously:]

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Wasn't it all queer? That poor man wasn't a dangerous lunatic, after all! He was only unbalanced; sort of simple, you know. He had a queer fancy that he had once known mother, and strange to say she influenced him at once. He went away quietly, without another word, after he had got a little — sherry. He really seemed ill, didn't he, Amy? I wonder who he could be, poor soul! To call himself just Andr-r-rew in that pathetic fashion! I'm glad Betty wasn't at home, she's so tender-hearted.

[But when Mrs. Fauquier has again vanished above stairs, the subdued panic begins again.]

MISS CARESSA. — What can it mean? There was the strangest pathos about him. He certainly did not seem to me in the least like an unbalanced person.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*clapping her hands spitefully*). — It means that Mrs. Fauquier has found her poor relation, and that she does NOT mean to invite him here to enjoy the good things that have fallen to her lot.



LADY BLANCHE COMES TO
HER OWN

—

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LADY BLANCHE COMES TO HER OWN

PROLOGUE

[In the lovely valley of the Shenandoah, overshadowed by the luminous mists of the Blue Mountains, stood once upon a time La Bordière, the stately home of Blanche Girondelle's ancestors. But in that fatal hour when General Lee's army fought valiantly within sight of their own firesides, La Bordière was burnt to the ground, and its treasures were scattered by enemies, who were, after all, but cousins from over the line.

During his brief stay at Provincialatis, the Rev. Wilmer Day and Miss Plymouth frequently discussed the old sore question from diverse points of view, for the North is many-minded about the South, although the Southern estimate of the North is more nearly unanimous. And the Rev. Wilmer had valiantly adopted the Southern point of view.]

REV. WILMER. — It is impossible to reflect unmoved upon the great Virginia houses that were swept away, the irreparable loss and destruction of never-to-be-replaced things, in what was passed lightly over in the North as "the breaking up of Southern homes."

MISS PLYMOUTH.—Well, I don't know. These people down here seem to have suffered very little. They're well enough off.

REV. WILMER.—A few in this immediate neighborhood may have escaped, and many others may have retrieved their fortunes. But I fancy the suffering was everywhere. You have heard about The Towers, of course.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*laughing unpleasantly*).—Oh, yes! The Towers was one of those palatial places one hears about down here, but never sees. All I've got to say is, if it was as run down and neglected as Westmoreland house, the final destruction was a work of supererogation.

REV. WILMER.—But, my dear Miss Plymouth, The Towers and La Bordière are said to have been among the finest estates in the South.

MISS PLYMOUTH.—That's all very well, Mr. Day. You've not been here as long as I have, or you'd realize that everything pertaining to Provincialitis is finest of its kind. These people live, move, and have their being in superlatives. I like some things in the positive degree, myself.

REV. WILMER.—To go back to La Bordière, Miss Girondelle's position was typical of hundreds of Southern gentlewomen. Bereft at a blow of home, father, lover, fort-

une, she went adrift upon a series of never-to-be-finished visits to such kith and kin as were left in a condition to offer her the necessities of life —

MISS PLYMOUTH (*sarcastically*). — The luxuries, you mean, Mr. Day. My Lady Blanche is too daintily made, and too delicate of taste, to have had a mind for mere necessities.

REV. WILMER. — So she took flight from her native valley, and, after fluttering hither and thither for years, came to settle permanently in the nest of the Fauquiers —

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Who happened, Mr. Day, to have had their money in Northern investments, and so to have escaped the ruin which swept the South in the track of war and emancipation.

REV. WILMER (*looking steadily into the speaker's cold, sharp eyes*). — Is it to be wondered at, Miss Plymouth, that a girl brought up as Miss Girondelle was, to every elegance and luxury, should have shrunk from the gaunt horrors of a condition not only impoverished, but made absolutely barren of everything but the beautiful old spirit of hereditary pride which has outlived the paralyzing effects of an unsuccessful struggle?

MISS PLYMOUTH (*sniffing*). — You talk like a Provincialatin, Mr. Day. Your elo-

quence is positively touching. But I'm afraid these people will not give you credit for so much comprehension of their feelings. They've never believed in my sympathy in the least. Even at this late day, I believe Miss Girondelle sees in me an embodiment of that disaster which tore from her the possessions of her youth.

REV. WILMER. — Does she ever refer to past grandeur? I think I have never heard any of these gentlewomen deplore their loss of wealth.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Oh, dear, no! Not in the presence of my Northern obtuseness. I fancy they talk about nothing else when they are to themselves; but they are superbly superior to painful reminiscences of a lost cause or broken fortune when I'm about.

REV. WILMER (*smiling slightly*). — I honor their reticence. They would not suffer their dignity to be demeaned by our pity. All the same, I wish I might get nearer to them. I would give a great deal to call the Lady Blanche my friend. . . .

SCENE I

The spirit which has followed Miss Girondelle through life is not the desire to befriend her, but to be honored by her friendship, and she is welcomed as its most cherished guest in many a charming home. Miss Plymouth, who is slowly reconciling her theories

to the ways of nearly every one else in Provincialatis, still fails to comprehend Miss Girondelle. Whenever the two ladies meet, it is as the coming together of two opposing streams. Miss Girondelle's nature is a spontaneous on-rush of delicious impulses unhindered by the dull impediments of every-day life. Miss Plymouth is a steady sweep of unswerving principles which seeks in vain to meet with reasonable resistance the current of the other's impetuosity. The fact that Miss Girondelle's exalted standing in society is unaffected by her penniless condition gives the rich Northern woman great concern. In vain she tries to probe the secret, among a people who do not care intuitively for material things. Their thoughts, like their speech, will never be hers. It is useless to dispute any matter with them.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*in the tone of a settled question*). — Why, Blanche Girondelle, in her young days, was the beauty of three counties!

MISS PLYMOUTH (*contentiously*). — Well, I was brought up to care very little about personal attractions. Besides, she's not a beauty now. Yet her looks are expected to carry her right along to the end.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*staring at the non-comprehending interloper*). — You don't understand us down here, Miss Plymouth. Affection and sentiment, and loyalty and blue blood, count for something in our part of the world.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — So I have observed.

But Miss Girondelle isn't indigenous to the soil. Doesn't she come from the Shenandoah valley?

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Miss Girondelle is a true Southern lady, Miss Plymouth. She belongs to one of the first families of the South.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*with asperity*). — And is that a sufficient reason why she should never have felt called upon to do anything for her living?

MRS. FAUQUIER (*grandly*). — Pray, Miss Plymouth, reserve such suggestions for some one who is less of an aristocrat than Blanche Girondelle. Why, we all look upon her as a dethroned queen who is only waiting for some turn of chance to bring her to her own.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Well, you know, Mrs. Fauquier, it isn't likely any such chance will occur. We don't live in the mediæval days of romance, I believe. Having lost everything but her blue blood more than thirty years ago, it isn't probable there's any "own" for her to come to. Now, the women of the South for whom I have had the greatest respect are those who turned to and supported themselves when they lost their property.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*with scorn*). — What



extraordinarily low ideas you have, socially, in the North! I reckon you'd like to see Lady Blanche making pickles and preserves with her own hands and sending them around for sale, as some of our Southern girls were forced to do, poor things!

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Precisely. It is certainly more high-toned to be independent than to live upon charity.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*rising in wrath*). — Charity! charity! I don't know what you mean by charity. I assure you, Blanche Girondelle belongs to several of the finest families of Virginia. Her people, who have long ago recovered from their losses, all clamor to get her back, and I only hold on to her by the utmost persuasion. As for independence, her independent spirit is irresistible. It carries before it all belittling thoughts of obligation such as you have allowed yourself to express. Let me tell you, Miss Plymouth, no syllable has ever reached her ears from the people down here that could suggest such a thought as dependence to her sensitive mind. Provincialitis would scorn to remind her of her misfortunes.

[Miss Plymouth laughs, which is, it must be admitted, an ill-bred thing to do, considering the high-strung condition of the other lady's feelings.]

Mrs. Fauquier, who is very wroth, sweeps out of the room with a remark upon the vulgarity of New England manners and opinions, which Betty Fauquier seeks to cover with a conciliatory speech.]

BETTY. — I don't think you quite understand the whole truth, Miss Plymouth. We all love Lady Blanche. She is so delightfully bright and happy-tempered that no one can get enough of her society. She realizes only the joy of life.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Precisely, my dear. She skims along the surface like a bird, or some other ridiculously irresponsible creature. She utterly repudiates the utilitarian, and everybody encourages her. At her age it is simply preposterous.

BETTY. — We think it is fascinating. She is welcomed everywhere, just as the bird is.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Well, it is most extraordinary. I verily believe no one in Provincialitis, excepting myself, would dare tell her that she has shirked all the responsibilities of life.

BETTY (*softly*). — I wouldn't repeat that, Miss Plymouth. Nobody would indorse you, and it would only be one more proof of the difference between your ways and ours. We all adore Lady Blanche just as she is, and wouldn't have her different for the world. Why, I've heard my father say

that when she first stopped here, right after the war, it was a godsend just to see her bright face and hear her merry speeches, when every one else was depressed and miserable.

MISS PLYMOUTH (*stoutly*). — All same, Miss Betty, I contend that no woman of nearly sixty years of age has a right to go on living upon a sprightly manner and a good disposition.

BETTY. — But she's witty, Miss Plymouth. No one can say such clever things as Miss Girondelle.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Then she should have put her wits to some useful purpose. Why should the world owe her a living?

BETTY (*irrelevantly*). — The Girondelle jewels were the most noted in the country. Some one came over from France to make inquiries about them. But they were all destroyed, or stolen, when La Bardière was burnt.

MISS PLYMOUTH. — Where did those wonderful jewels come from? I suspect they were half of them paste.

BETTY (*looking amazed*). — Oh, no, Miss Plymouth, they were not! The Girondelles are of high French descent. The jewels came down through a wealthy creole grandmother to whom they were given by a royal prince.

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MISS PLYMOUTH (*wagging her head*).— I guess that is some excuse for her flights. Only I never could see the sense in a woman's keeping a baby face and kittenish ways until she's seventy. What's she going to do when she comes to die? Give me common sense for this world — and the next too.

SCENE II

[It is genuine heart content with Miss Girondelle, as far as any human being can know. She has met the woful changes of her lot with mirthful air of one who acknowledges only pleasantries. If ever, in the secret places of her own soul or the solitude of her own chamber, she takes off the smiling mask and looks at her life momentarily with the stern Face of Tragedy she gives no sign.

“Lady Blanche does not mind,” “Lady Blanche is always happy,” “Nothing troubles Lady Blanche,” are phrases that pass current in the various households where she is accustomed to be at home. Mrs. Fauquier's firm belief in the non-existence of that unworn Face is so absolute as very nearly to make it a certainty. Even hidden truth cannot fly in the teeth of a universally accepted verdict; and it is more than probable that Miss Girondelle has long ago lost the Tragic Mask, if she ever possessed one. Only one human being has ever caught a glimpse of the shadows of that Face.

One day when Mrs. Jerold is reclining lazily in her luxurious library, an unread French novel in her lap, Miss Girondelle flutters into the room.]

MRS. JEROLD. — My dear Blanche! I am

so glad you've come ! I was getting horribly bored with my own society, and here is a letter from Amy Caressa saying she can't be here for a fortnight. Some impossible excuse about her mother being sick and their having no cook —

MISS GIRONDELLE. — As though Amy Caressa were good for anything but to look pretty, and to be your satellite.

MRS. JEROLD. — Well, I don't know. Amy has shown a good deal of spirit lately. I'm afraid she is getting tired of revolving around me.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — No one could ever get tired of you, Hetty. But I've come on business.

MRS. JEROLD (*sitting up*). — On business? Who ever heard of you having business?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Nevertheless, it is true. I want you to go to Secessia with me; and with money in your purse.

MRS. JEROLD (*amazed*). — What on earth do you want to go to that remote country-town for?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — I want to find some old letters. I'm not so strong as I used to be, Hetty, and I want those letters before — (*stops*).

MRS. JEROLD. — And why on earth should your letters be at Secessia?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — See here, Hetty Culpepper, you know all about my past, and that I've got plenty of pride, and all that, so I don't intend to apologize — mind you, not for the money or anything. The fact is, some things of mine, a few pieces of furniture and a trunk saved from the fire, have been stored there all these years.

MRS. JEROLD. — Blanche, you are never going to rake up those old ashes now, when all has been forgotten.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*ignoring interruption*). — I can't stand it any longer. I must open that trunk. Hetty, they are *his* letters, and — and I'm afraid the man who has those things will die, and my trunk be opened — or lost.

MRS. JEROLD. — But why in the world have you never sent for your things?

MISS GIRONDELLE (*with smothered excitement*). — Or I might die myself suddenly, and some one else would see those letters. It has been on my mind for years.

MRS. JEROLD. — My dear Blanche, you must answer me. Why have your things been there all this time?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Don't interrupt me, please. I must go on now I have commenced. I went there several times long ago, and asked the man to let me open that trunk, and he wouldn't; not while the things were there —

MRS. JEROLD. — Then why didn't you have them brought here?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — And now I feel that it can't go on any longer. I must have access to them. You see (*laughing a little hysterically*) if I should happen to die, and those letters were brought to light, the contrast between them and my gray hairs —

MRS. JEROLD (*starting violently*). — Blanche, it isn't because you haven't had the money to get your things, is it?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Yes, it is, if you must know. The man has held them for back storage. It amounts to one hundred and seventy-five dollars. Hetty, I have not seen them for twenty years.

MRS. JEROLD (*tears springing to her eyes*). — And you have wanted that pitiful little sum all these years?

MISS GIRONDELLE (*lightly*). — Oh, no, I have not. It has been accumulating. It was only five dollars a year. I could easily have paid it, in the beginning, only there was no place to put the furniture.

MRS. JEROLD. — And you've endured distress of mind rather than tell me? Oh, Blanche, how could you!

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Well, dear, it wasn't your fault, or Agnes Fauquier's either, for she knows nothing about the things. And you have both wanted me to accept an in-

come. But somehow I've felt more independent without taking money. It's this way, Hetty: Suppose a princess were driven from her inheritance, and had taken nothing but her crown, which loyalty to her lost kingdom would prevent her selling, you would not offer her a yearly stipend. You would rather say nothing about her support, I think. Unless (*anxiously*) — Hetty, you would not have had the princess sell her crown, would you?

MRS. JEROLD. — Of course not. Never! But, oh, Blanche! you must want money sorely sometimes.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*airily*). — Oh, no, I do not! One does not need money in Provincialitis. And when I go visiting, there's always some one to get my tickets — Hetty, what are you crying for?

MRS. JEROLD. — It seems so cruel that the few little things saved from that awful wreck — no one knew there was anything saved — should have been in pawn all this time.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*cheerily*). — Never mind! I could not have used them. And I knew they were safe. Remember, I have wanted for nothing. But now I must have those letters. Will you go?

MRS. JEROLD. — Go! I would go to the ends of the earth, if that would compensate you for the past.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Don't be dramatic, Hetty. Only never tell any one, please. Do you think we could go to-morrow? I've brought my keys.

MRS. JEROLD. — We will go this afternoon. Uncle Gabe will drive us to Dullton, where we take the train for Secessia. We can stay all night, if the old hotel is there yet, and come back to-morrow afternoon.

SCENE III

[They start, after a hurried luncheon, and Miss Girondelle's spirits rise to the highest pitch. She laughs and chats about a hundred episodes of the past—all amusing episodes; not one sorrowful allusion is made to the tragedy of La Bordière. Mrs. Jerold is preoccupied with troubled reflections upon the melancholy side of the journey; but Miss Girondelle is radiantly oblivious of pathos, enlarging enthusiastically upon her long-lost possessions and the beauty of their antique forms.]

MISS GIRONDELLE. — There's the big mahogany desk. I recollect how old Bliss used to polish at the brass handles because he liked to make the griffin's head laugh. This is the desk key. (*Drawing from her reticule an enormous bunch of keys, thirty at least, and selecting a large, carefully rubbed brass one.*) I've always kept it polished.

MRS. JEROLD. — Are those the keys of — (*stops*).

MISS GIRONDELLE. — They are the keys of La Bordière, Hetty. The trunk key is among them.

MRS. JEROLD. — And you have cherished them — all these years?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Why not? They are souvenirs of a never-forgotten past. You all think me volatile, and so I am. But I have not forgotten.

[Reaching their journey's end, Miss Girondelle's subdued excitement becomes a gentle flutter.]

Suppose the storage place should be gone — suppose the old man who kept it should be dead — suppose he should refuse to accept their statement of claim upon the property (*she had long ago lost the receipt*) — suppose he should make some exorbitant charge — suppose, oh, Hetty! suppose the things are gone?

[They pick their way down a narrow by-street in the ugly, bustling little town that has lost the old air of exclusiveness which they remember, having become modern, commonplace, hideous. Miss Girondelle fails at first to identify the particular doorway she is anxiously seeking. She cannot find it.]

It ought to be over yonder — just there — no, there! Ah, here it is!

[She skips nimbly across the threshold, forgetful of her years, even of her habitual high-bred dignity. A small, wizened man, very old and much stooped, creeps forward feebly. He

is very, very deaf, and it takes both time and patience to persuade him that his customers wish something which they consider worth paying for. The stores which come to his care are not usually of the sort that demand a settlement of accounts. He pores long and helplessly over a tattered book of receipts which he unearths from some obscure depth, and which bears the figures 186—, nearly illegible in the general smuttiness. At last his dirty, fumbling finger stops hesitatingly and Miss Girondelle whisks around the crazy table to read her own half-obliterated signature.

Then follows a slow and laborious calculation of arrears, and not until the uttermost penny is paid will he permit his exhausted visitors to pass beyond the front shop, which is piled high with many nondescript things.

The two ladies follow their tottering guide across a littered court and through a narrow door that hangs dismally upon one rusty hinge. Whispering that this was the place, — up these steps, — Miss Girondelle almost trips up the dark, steep stairway to the garret, while Mrs. Jerold follows, panting.

They hear the groaning of a long-unused lock, the creaking of a long-unopened door, and presently Miss Girondelle stands, palpitating, in the presence of her lost treasures. The low-ceiled room is so dim with dusty garret obscurity, so dingy with generations of cobwebs, so piled with the accumulated rubbish of half a century, that at first nothing is visible but the vague outlines of looming shapes.

The deaf old man rummages about in silence, while Mrs. Jerold murmurs, awe-struck, that it

brings to mind a description she had once read about a room full of Indian idols and Chinese josses. But for answer she only hears the beating of her companion's heart. In the silence Miss Girondelle stands as one transfixed, the huge bunch of keys held in a nervous grasp. Immediately in front she is beginning to make out the shape of an old mahogany desk, blackened, worm-eaten, battered, without polish or beauty. The doors hang half open upon broken hinges; the drawers are gone.]

MISS GIRONDELLE (*stammering*). — Where — where are the brass handles?

MRS. JEROLD. — Can that be your desk, Blanche?

MISS GIRONDELLE (*in a whisper*). — I think so. I seem to recognize something about it. Where (*to the old man, trying to rally*) — where are the other articles?

OLD MAN (*pointing vaguely into obscurity*). — I reckon there wasn't much mo', except-in' that old bed and bureau yonder.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*following the direction of his index finger into the dingy mazes of the garret*). — Hetty! they're here. But what — what ails them?

[Mrs. Jerold makes her way carefully among the hideously neglected-looking objects that choke the fearful corners of the garret, until she reaches her friend's side. There she sees a dilapidated bedstead with three posts, and a bureau from which the glass is gone.]

MISS GIRONDELLE (*on the verge of hyster-*

ics). — I can't believe it! They're mine, and yet not mine. Oh, Hetty! they never looked like this — at La Bordière.

MRS. JEROLD (*soothingly*). — Never mind, dear. That bedstead has superb posts, and the carving on the bureau is exquisite in spite of the broken mirror-frame. Of course the things have been injured, but they will do up beautifully. Let us hunt for the trunk.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*with a start, beginning to laugh nervously*). — I was so dazed by the appearance of these fragments that for a moment the trunk went out of my mind. Oh, Hetty! I dread to look for it now.

MRS. JEROLD. — The trunk will be all right. It isn't like furniture, you know, and has no beauty to be marred. Let us find it.

[Slowly, with the old man's help, they begin to poke and pry among the remains of other people's wreckage. It is all so much useless lumber, except to the possible eye which might identify each shapeless mass. Presently Miss Girondelle stops with a faint cry. She catches hold of her companion's arm and points tragically to a heap of *débris* at their feet. In response to a gasp of incredulity from Mrs. Jerold, she nods her head, a strained look coming into the fine, pathetic face. But she still laughs a little.]

There is no need of the key hidden in that huge useless bunch trembling in the nervous tension of Miss Girondelle's grasp. The lid has fallen or been dragged off, and the varied contents are in sad disorder.]

Blanche, dear, find the letters and let us go.

[Mrs. Jerold watches with an acute sense of pity while the other drops upon her knees and begins to search with trembling hands.

A couple of gowns of rich material, but ancient make ; a few musty and unsavory books, their gilded backs defaced, their pages brown and mildewed ; a pile of yellow, time-stained undergarments ; a faded shawl of embroidered china *crêpe*. Nothing else ; absolutely nothing.

Three times Miss Girondelle turns over the worthless articles. Then she lifts a white face with a wan ghost of her bright smile :]

It must have been a mistake, Hetty. The letters were not with these things. They must have been in another trunk, and they were burned.

Oh, my darling's letters ! Oh, Hetty ! I nearly lost my life trying to save that trunk — and it was the wrong one ! . . . They were burned ! Now I feel bereft indeed. There is nothing left to me out of my beautiful lost youth — nothing — NOTHING !

**THE LAST FLIGHT OF MISS
GIRONDELLE**



THE LAST FLIGHT OF MISS GIRONDELLE

PROLOGUE

[Mrs. Jerold is a splendid type of the Southern gentlewoman. She is large and fair, inclined to plumpness, with a seductive love of idleness, a delight in sensuous comfort, a passion for beautiful surroundings. Her eyes are blue, but the lashes and hair are jet black. Amy Caressa might tell a secret of that dead-black hair, and also of the exquisite rose-bloom which is habitual to her softly rounded cheek. But Provincialatis does not look upon helps to personal charm with the cold Northern eye. And Amy Caressa has come to be in feeling quite a Provincialatin.

Mrs. Jerold possesses a certain complexity of temperament made up of cleverness and indolence, of tenderness and cynicism, of nobility and selfishness, which is well understood in her native place, although less prized when she travels abroad. Miss Plymouth finds her the most obtuse and enervating of women, believing her phlegmatic nature to be capable of nothing but indifference. Miss Girondelle, on the contrary, knows her to be the most sympathetic of human beings, and believes that by Hetty Culpepper all her most secret caprices are divined. Amy Caressa, who sees more of the lady in question than anybody else, is divided in her opinion, siding sometimes mentally with

Miss Plymouth, sometimes sentimentally with Miss Girondelle, but always adoring her with that compulsion of passionate fervor which a young girl knows how to bestow upon a fascinating woman old enough to be her mother.

Hetty Culpepper, always as spicy as her maiden name suggests, has been a life-long friend of Miss Girondelle, having spent much of her girlhood at La Bordière, where she disputed Blanche's lovers with the precocity of sweet fifteen in the South — Blanche being then a mature coquette of twenty-five.

The Jerolds, like the Fauquiers, had escaped the ruin of the Confederacy's terrible days of disaster; and at seventeen Hetty Culpepper had fled from her impoverished home to marry Fred Jerold, who fought unscathed through the war, with what was known as "the good luck of the Jerolds."

From time immemorial they have occupied the finest house in Provincialatis, which holds up its head with the most aristocratic places in the county, ignoring the old Southern tradition that people of the best status do not live in streets. The old Jerold Mansion is a Colonial gem, which was left standing only because the Northern officers saw fit to use it for their headquarters. It is built of English brick, its gabled roof being supported by large white pillars rising unbroken by upper porches. It is so hedged about by rows of massive box-bushes, and so overshadowed by two great chestnut-trees, one on each side of the wide front door, that even "Stonewall," in the midst of its broad acres, a mile out from the town, has not an air more exclusive.

(Parenthetically, "Stonewall" had been known to generations of ante-bellum Fauquiers as "Stonehill;" and the people of Provincialatis do not lightly alter the name of their family seat. But an idol of the South

had once made it his friendly stopping-place, and the change grew out of that memorable event.)

The Jerold Mansion and "Stonewall" occupy an equally enviable position in the veneration of Provincialists, and the two households enjoy an intimacy shared by only a few of the best county families.]

SCENE I

MRS. FAUQUIER (*to Mrs. Jerold, who enters the morning-room unannounced*).—I'm so glad to see you, Hetty! Blanche is not well, and we can't find out what ails her.

MRS. JEROLD.—Blanche not well? How unusual! May I go up?

MRS. FAUQUIER.—Of course. It will cheer her to see you.

MRS. JEROLD.—Cheer her? You don't mean that Blanche Girondelle is actually low-spirited.

MRS. FAUQUIER.—Not really low-spirited, but—I scarcely know how to describe it. She is sort of reminiscent. You must talk to her about old times and old acquaintances, people that I never knew. She seems to be thinking back to her girlhood. Go up with Mrs. Jerold, Betty.

BETTY FAUQUIER (*whispering as they slowly mount the polished stairway*).—Mrs. Jerold, mother does not seem to notice it, but I think Lady Blanche is a little—odd.

MRS. JEROLD (*whispering*). — Do you mean she is flighty?

BETTY. — No; I reckon it isn't quite that. You will see what I mean.

[They enter a large airy chamber, where Miss Girondelle lies on a lounge by an open window. She is clad loosely in a rich crimson satin dressing-gown of antique pattern and make. Her delicate head, with the soft fluff of gray hair curling on her forehead, as it had done when she was a girl, is tilted birdwise on one side. Her pretty, faded face is turned toward the open window, out of which her soft eyes gaze wistfully into the Beyond.]

MRS. JEROLD. — Why, Blanche, one doesn't often catch you playing at being ill.

MISS GIRONDELLE (*turning about quickly, brightening at once*). — No, indeed! I really feel guilty, and am dreading all the time lest the Rock should fall upon me and crush me for my indolence.

MRS. JEROLD. — I think the combined Fauquiers will be able to protect you. But tell me, dear, are you really ill?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Not a bit of it. I never felt better in my life, but I'm a little tired — a prey to "masterly inactivity." Betty, would you mind carrying those magnolias into the next room? They're a little strong. Thank you. (*To Mrs. Jerold, whispering.*) I've had such a queer attack, Hetty, but you musn't tell.

MRS. JEROLD. — Of course not, if you don't wish it. But what sort of attack?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — A kind of heart trouble, I think. But it's over now.

MRS. JEROLD. — Ought you not to see a doctor, Blanche?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Indeed, I shall not. What do I want with a doctor? You'll be sending me a parson next.

MRS. JEROLD. — Well, of course you know what you want, but I should feel more easy to have Dr. Winchester see you.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — That's just like you, Hetty; to ignore the fact that St. John Winchester was a lover of mine forty years ago, and his wife has never got over being jealous.

MRS. JEROLD (*smiling secretly*). — But his wife need not know. She doesn't go about with him on his rounds. And besides —

MISS GIRONDELLE (*mysteriously*). — No, it wouldn't do. You've no idea how awfully he was in love, Hetty. It would be embarrassing. I don't believe he's over it yet.

[She puts her thin hand on her chest, a little up towards the throat, breathing quickly, and lets it lie there as though touching something.]

Would you mind leaving us a little, Betty? That's a dear. And tell your mother I'm quite well, and shall be ready for our rubber this evening as usual. Now, Hetty

(*as the door closes behind the girl's retreating figure*), I want you to promise me something.

MRS. JEROLD (*pressing the dainty hand*). — Indeed I will. Anything you like.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Well, of course I've got to die some day. You need not suppose I'm nervous and think I'm going to die now. I expect to live to be eighty, like my creole grandmother. She was a wonderful woman, you know, and a beauty to the day of her death, with eyes like stars and a marvellous complexion that made all the girls envious. . . . But we must all get out of the world somehow, though I never could reconcile myself to the way it's done. I think people should be taken up bodily; or else vanish away; or else — (*she lies back, panting a little*). However, that's all been fixed for us, so the best thing to do is not to think about it. What I am coming to is this: I want you to promise me that no one shall touch me until —

[Miss Girondelle gives a sudden gasp. A swift spasm, as of some strong personal emotion, convulses her face.]

MRS. JEROLD (*tenderly*). — My dear Blanche! When you feel so strong a recoil, why do you talk of such things?

MISS GIRONDELLE (*laughing nervously*). — Oh, it isn't that. It was the heart trouble

again; not exactly pain, you know; only a queer sort of feeling somewhere. Never mind; I want to go on—I must. Hand me that fan, Hetty. Thank you.

MRS. JEROLD. — Can't you wait until to-morrow, when you are feeling better?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — No; I want you to promise me, to-day, that no one shall touch me until you have taken from my neck something I have always worn.

MRS. JEROLD. — I see: a miniature. I will take it from your neck, dear,—if I should be here. I may be dead myself, you know, if you live to be eighty.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, no, you won't. You are ten years younger than I, and the Culpeppers never die.

MRS. JEROLD. — But what am I to do with the miniature?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Bury it with me. Mind, I did not call it a miniature. Whatever you find, slip it in—beside me, when no one is looking, so that it may go with me into the other life.

MRS. JEROLD (*her voice trembling*). — But, my dear Blanche, nothing goes with us of that sort—nothing.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, yes, it does, according to my belief. You did not know I had a belief, did you, Hetty?

MRS. JEROLD. — Well, one hardly calls that a belief —

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Indeed one does ! I always was a pagan at heart, you know, but I've never given it out as a matter of creed. I am convinced that the one thing I've held on to in the body all these years will belong to me in whatever state comes next. If I am to be reincarnated, why so will that one treasure. If not — well, then let the earth keep us both.


MRS. JEROLD. — Oh, Blanche ! Don't call it reincarnation. Think of the soul, not the body. It is resurrection we look for.

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Now, Hetty, don't preach. It doesn't become you. And besides, you are just as much of a heathen as I am — in your way ; only you won't admit it. I tell you, my hope is to be reincarnated ; to come back to this beautiful earth in some shape or other, if only as a bird or a butterfly. I haven't any affinity for the world of spirits — if there is one.

MRS. JEROLD. — But think of heaven — Oh, Blanche !

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Well, heaven, if you choose to call it that. You promise me, Hetty ?

MRS. JEROLD (*sighing*). — Indeed I will. I'll tell Agnes to send for me — in time. Good-by, dear.



MISS GIRONDELLE (*settling herself comfortably*). — Now that's fixed, I feel like a millionaire who has made his last will and testament, leaving everything to charity. Get me a scarf, Hetty; the light blue crêpe one, from the second drawer of my chiffonière. . . . Thank you. . . . It's the one St. John Winchester brought me from Paris. It was always becoming, look! Somehow, my possessions never seem to wear out. (*Draws it about her.*)

MRS. JEROLD. — Do you feel chilly, Blanche?

MISS GIRONDELLE. — Oh, dear, no! I never was more comfortable in my life. The scarf is becoming, that's all. Good-by, Hetty. Don't mind what I said. It was only one of my flights. Of course I believe in heaven. Kiss me. . . .

[As Mrs. Jerold leaves the room, the same sharp spasm she had mistaken for emotion convulses the countenance of Lady Blanche. She falls back upon her pillow, and there is a short, sharp struggle for breath. But the Tragic Face is only worn for an instant. It is replaced by Miss Girondelle's own brilliant smile, the dazzle of which gradually fades out, leaving a look of happy contentment. When Betty Fauquier goes up an hour later with a little silver tray of dainties for the invalid's supper, Blanche Girondelle's spirit has taken its last flight.]

SCENE II

[Mrs. Jerold is still in the house, having lingered at "Stonewall" to drink tea and talk over the indisposition of their beloved friend. When the brief panic which comes with sudden death is over, they stand together looking at the waxen face, which is smooth and smiling like the face of a child. Mrs. Fauquier weeps, but Mrs. Jerold is tearless.]

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Oh, what a beautiful way to die, Hetty! If Blanche could have chosen, she would have asked to go just like that, without any pain or distress.

MRS. JEROLD. — Or any unpleasantness. She would have shrunk from the ugly details of a long illness or a protracted dying, more than from the pain.

BETTY (*sobbing*). — And Lady Blanche did not have to know. She never dreamed of dying.

MRS. JEROLD. — Perhaps she knew more than we think. Would you mind leaving me alone with her for a moment?

MRS. FAUQUIER (*surprised*). — Why, certainly not, if —

MRS. JEROLD (*hastily*). — It is only that she asked me — scarcely an hour ago, Agnes, only think! — in case she should die, to take something from her neck — a miniature or something — that no one should see it.

MRS. FAUQUIER (*wistfully*). — I wonder

why she asked you instead of me, Hetty? No one loved her as I did.

MRS. JEROLD. — I think because I knew her and loved her in the old days at La Bordière. The miniature is doubtless something connected with her early life. But I shall not open it. Whosoever face she has worn so long, it shall be her secret.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — But you will have to pass it on, some day.

MRS. JEROLD. — No; it is to be buried with her.

MRS. FAUQUIER. — Was that what she asked?

MRS. JEROLD. — Only that. Blanche had far more reticence than any of us realized. You will leave me to carry out her wish?

[When Mrs. Jerold is alone with the smiling, waxen face, that somehow looks precisely like the face she, as a girl, had thought so beautiful, she stands irresolute a long while. Well as she has known the dead woman, dearly as she has cherished her confidence, she shrinks from such familiarity as is implied in undoing the silken vest and drawing forth a long-hidden secret. Only the purpose not to open what she hopes is closed enables her to violate the sanctity of what has always been called "the Girondelle pride."

At last she nerves herself to the fulfilment of her promise. But when the lamplight falls upon the Lady Blanche's snow-white breast, revealing what lies there, she draws hastily back as though an adder had crept from over

the still heart. No queen could have worn a necklace of more superb gems than this lonely woman had concealed in her bosom for more than thirty years of penury. There are ten large emeralds of the finest quality, set with innumerable diamonds of such splendid radiance that Hetty Jerold is dazed.]

MRS. JEROLD (*gasping*). — The wonderful necklace! — the necklace given her creole grandmother by a prince of the royal blood. All these years the world has believed the gems were lost, scattered, stolen, destroyed, in the fire. All these years she has been literally penniless, when the sale of the jewels would have given her a competence. All these years she has hidden this one remnant of her luxurious days — all these years! Oh, Blanche, Blanche!

[Silence.]

MRS. JEROLD (*sobbing passionately, as she unclasps the superb bauble*). — Think of the brave heart of this woman, who has suffered privations, who has been deprived of those bits of furniture which had gone to decay piece-meal for want of a miserable stipend to redeem them, who had yet been able to keep a proud front to the world because of this magnificent secret which she was not willing even death should wrest from her! . . . Why did I not catch the meaning of that single potent sentence: "You would not have the princess sell her crown to pay for her

living, would you?" Thank Heaven, I gave an indignant denial. . . . This, then, was the hidden spring of Blanche Girondelle's buoyant life. She never parted with her crown. Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!

[Prolonged silence, during which the speaker stands staring at the gorgeous necklace taken from the dead woman's breast.]

MRS. JEROLD (*smiling as she gently closes the silken vest, and conceals the necklace in her reticule.*— Oh, how proud she looks! how proud and happy!—my Princess who has never lost her inheritance. And the smile on her patrician features! Death respects that, too. When Provincialatis shall lay her away with its best honors, the smile—and the necklace—will go with her under the coffin-lid.

HINDSIGHT

A SHADOW INTERLUDE

*"A gray, gray word and a gray belief—
True as iron and gray as grief.
Worse worlds there are, worse faiths, in truth,
Than the gray, gray world and the gray
belief."*

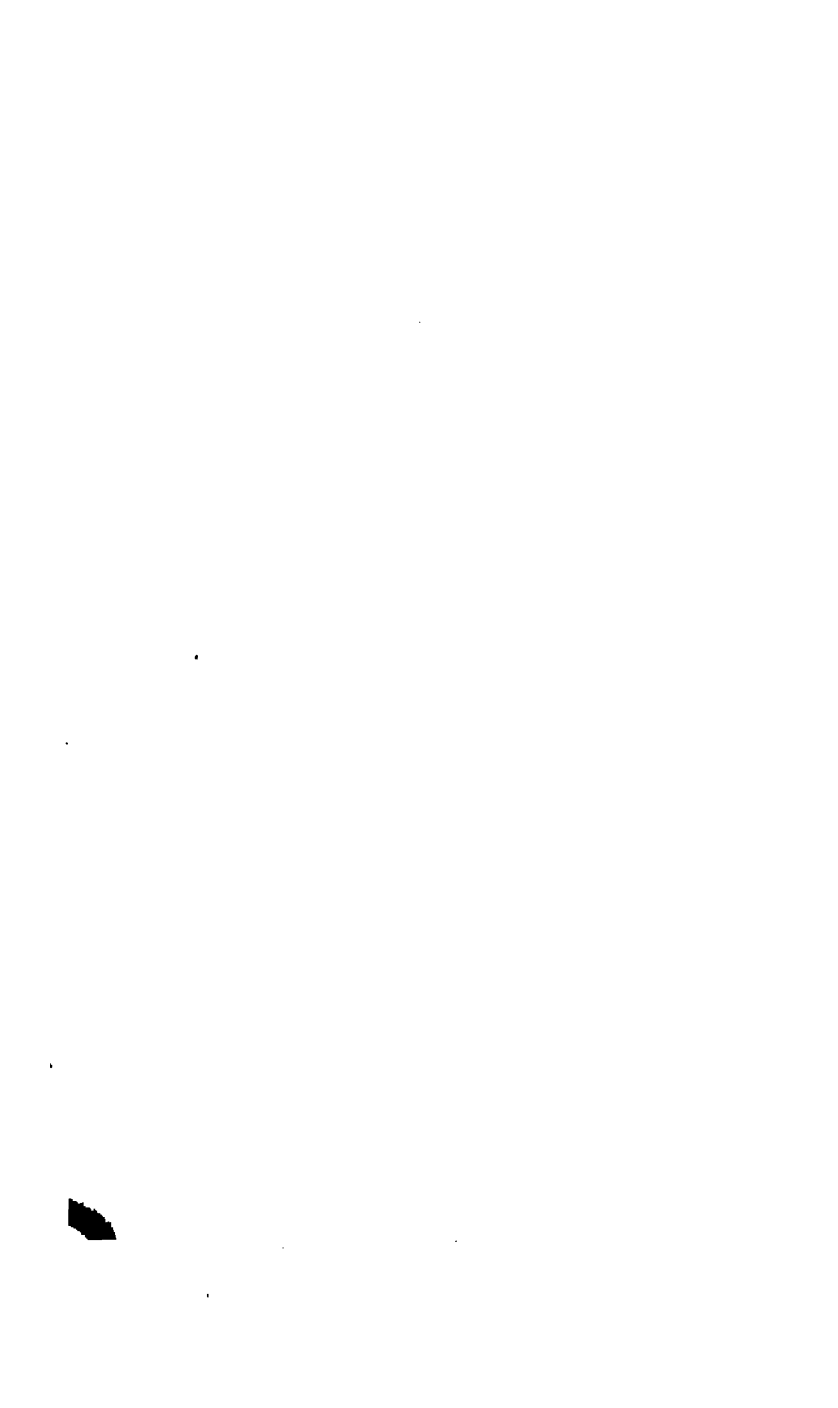
—From S. CROCKETT'S "Bog Myrtle and Peat."

HERE and there, in the sober interior of the practical Northern States, lie secluded townships which have been overlooked in the on-sweep of general advancement. They are melancholy little places, where the stern traits of Puritan grandfathers and the serious-mindedness of Puritan grandmothers still exist, showing themselves in mitigated but easily recognized characteristics. That almost pathetic unworldliness, which is in truth but an inability to reach the compensations of modern life, seems to linger about the inhabitants, even though they be shrewd, hard-working, and capable. It gives to the

men-folks a certain hard crust which often conceals many gentle virtues; while the women-kind are possessed of a dread of making themselves too agreeable which many times belies the inner kindness of their hearts.

One of these villages I will call Hindsight, although its precise location no man living knoweth. The flood-tide of progress has gone around it. Its inhabitants plod dully along, a half century behind the stirring towns and compact cities of the New England of to-day. But the weary worldling would still find in its sheltered precincts a more than passing attraction.

THE OSTRACISM OF PATIENCE



THE OSTRACISM OF PATIENCE

"Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made. Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep step with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."

Henry Thoreau.

CHAPTER I

NOW that the era of the bicycle is upon us, and women have come to shortening and dividing their nether garments unscathed, it is well-nigh impossible to realize the panic caused by such a proceeding thirty-five years ago. When Dr. Mary Walker trod the streets of Washington in male attire, it was only the strong arm of the law that prevented her from being mobbed. And the few remote disciples of masculine garb found

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their femininity, if not their morals, to be impeached even by the harmless hygienic bloomer.

Imagine, then, the consternation which a New Woman's costume would have created in the heart of Hindsight, in the primitive days called "before the war."

There is that in the blood and upbringing of those sturdy farmers which made the precepts and practices of their forbears absolute. If any new methods had sought to intrude into their rigid customs, there would have been nobody to take them by the hand. Even among the stern old-school folks, who aspired to adhere only to the ways they knew, Miss Patience Pinger was marked as one "whose hair bristled at the idea of novelty." To her native formalism was added a passion for having things unchanged, at which her neighbors had not failed to take offence.

She was a large, angular woman of the type known as "raw-boned." Her face was frank and pleasant enough, had there been any one who cared sufficiently about her to give her credit for what Hindsight would call "a good countenance." * * * * *

"I don't know's I see any need for a new bonnet. Seems like one bonnet's good's another, same's a parasol. Now, I've had that parasol for twenty years, and it ain't

shabby yet — not so to speak. What's reason a bonnet can't be made's lasting's a parasol?"

"But the bonnet's nigh about done for, ain't it?"

"Well, I don't know's it is. It ain't but five years come next fall since I got it, and 'twa'nt cheap neither. I calc'late to get a heap of wear out of that bonnet, Mis' Lane."

"Of course, Miss Pinger, if you don't mind about the fashions and all that, why, the bonnet'll do very well."

"Do? Well, I guess so! What's fashion? It don't appear to be no great round here, anyway. 'S far's I know, the new bonnets are pretty much like the old. I like old things myself."

"That's so, Patience Pinger, you spoke truth then. For if ever a mortal was set in old ways, it's you. I guess you won't think much of the New Jerusalem when you get there."

"Well, it depends, Mis' Lane. If the New Jerusalem's going to be all changing fashions and such, why, I don't expect to feel what you might call settled right off. But it's my opinion the sort of New Jerusalem that's waiting for Hindsight folks won't be no great different from Hindsight."

"I declare for't, Patience Pinger!" cried the

visitor, getting up and figuratively shaking the dust — there was no literal dust — from her feet. "If you ain't the near-mindedest person I ever come acrost! To set there and talk about the Heavenly City as though 'twas just 'round the corner. I'll leave you to your own near-mindedness, you and your bonnet."

Miss Patience sniffed dryly as her indignant guest departed with a withering glance flung back at the despised headgear.

"Well, I guess," she said to herself, "if I'd rather have an old fine Leghorn than a new coarse straw like 'Mandy Lane's — 's coarse 's corn husks — 'tain't a matter for the church to deal with."

For therein lay the secret of the old bonnet. Aside from her fierce conservatism, Miss Patience Pinger's refinement of taste was such that even in her work-a-day life, among the homely labors that were necessary to her daily existence, she preserved a delicacy of perception, a daintiness of habit, that made the vulgarities of poverty impossible to her. She lived "on her interest," in New England parlance. But no one knew precisely how she lived, although the provincial curiosity about one's neighbor very nearly balances the provincial reticence about one's self. Very nearly, but not quite. No amount of neighborly prying ever succeeded

in peering through the blinds which Miss Patience closed upon certain aspects of her domestic routine. That she cooked her simple meals and did her necessary house-work everybody knew. But that she got down upon her knees to scrub her floors, and washed and ironed her own garments, the world only surmised. No human being had ever found the temerity to break through an intense reserve which asked neither assistance nor confidence in the matter of daily drudgery. The solitary woman even tucked up her petticoats and spaded her little garden; but that was at midnight when the moon shone and when there were no passers-by. By day she only gathered her skirts about her and weeded the neat rows of vegetables and homely flowers.

As I said, it all happened thirty-five years ago, when New England villages were more primitive and New England people were less liberal-minded than to-day. They who lived in remote districts had only the straight and narrow way of their given orthodoxy in which to walk, and the man or woman who departed therefrom would have been morally and socially an outcast.

When Mrs. Lane reached home after her outraged departure from the lonely spinster's cottage she proceeded to edify her family

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over the evening meal with Miss Patience's obstinacy.

"When I offered to trim it for her, too," she added indignantly.

"Never you mind, 'Mandy," said her husband; "there's as much difference between fools as there is between folks. You'll find plenty of bonnets to trim's long's you're ready to do it for nothin'."

"Well, she does beat all for bein' set in her ways," continued the aggrieved neighbor. "To think of her holdin' out to be a pious woman, and then up and tellin' me she didn't set no great things by the New Jerusalem unless it's same as Hindsight!"

"You don't mean it!" cried Deacon Lane. "I call that downright blasphemy."

"No, 'twa'n't. Not the way she said it. 'Twa'n't nothin' but sheer setness—just to let on she was satisfied with her belongings and that old bonnet. It may last till kingdom come, for all me!"

CHAPTER II

MISS PATIENCE was a strenuous Christian (she pronounced it stre-nious), and belonged to the straightest of sects. Moreover, she was a laborious care-taker and an

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arduous doer of small things. Every act of her life was first solemnized by its being her bounden duty, and then canonized by its being done to the best of her ability. She never slighted anything, and she had the utmost respect for her every possession, from her creed to her candle-ends. The usages of the past, as well as the articles of clothing which had belonged to other days, were dear to her heart. And yet, deep down in her secret soul, Miss Patience was a believer in the practical, the utilitarian. If she could have been made to see the advantage in a new bonnet or a new spade over an old one, she would have gone systematically to work to possess one. But as yet she had never been made to see it.

Every Saturday morning she fetched a weekly newspaper from the village store, which she conscientiously laid aside until the forenoon's work was done and she had earned her one afternoon of rest. If the hours were not long enough for its complete perusal, it was carefully put away for "over Sabbath" (since no secular thoughts might intrude upon that holy day), to be finished at some odd interval of time.

Poor Miss Patience! What sort of information she got about the great restless world beyond the farthest horizon of Hackmatac,

who shall tell? What the stirrings of political parties, the upheavals of nations, the throes of social movements, the bringing forth of great events and colossal changes, — what it all signified to her it is impossible to surmise. Very likely the storm and stress of our own civil war were enacted before her eager old eyes, vaguely, incoherently, among the mists of remote and unknown causes, much as the vast battles of archangels are presented to our non-comprehending minds in the Miltonic supernatural warfare.

There was one thing beside her weekly newspaper, her flowers, her cat, which Miss Patience really loved, and that was her sister's family, living in the neighboring village of Hackmatac. For the sake of that family Hindsight was not all the world. The rare visits of Sister Susan, with young nieces and nephews swarming noisily over the quiet, tidy little house, were episodes which for the time being made her existence a career. Only once or twice in the twenty years of Susan Burdock's residence in Hackmatac had Miss Patience gone so far aside from her narrow ways as to pay a visit to the household which was more than dear to her lonely soul. But many a time had she, with secret joy, drained her straitened purse of the last copper of its weekly supply, that she might fill those

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juvenile stomachs with doughnuts and cookies, and their youthful hearts with passing satisfaction. They adored Aunt Patience. The plain, homely phrases which broke her habitual reticence were dear to them. If they slyly laughed at her oddities, her ancient bonnet and antiquated shawl, they none the less loved and respected her. One fair-faced, merry maiden of nineteen was especially near to the old maid's soul. Patty was her name-child, and upon her was lavished, unspoken and unsuspected, a wealth of tenderness which kept the spinster's heart young in spite of her barren life. She was not given to self-expression. Silence came easier than speech to this lonely old woman. But sometimes, when she sat over her fire with a chosen crony, she let pour from a pent-up store some of her garnered misgivings about Susan's family.

"It ain't that Joshuay's not a likely 'nough husband and father. I reckon he's good's they'll av'ridge. But 'tain't safe to count much on men-folks. He provides kinder well — up to a certain point. Then Susan she just has to fall to and do it herself. 'Tain't often; and I don't know's it's going to hurt her any. But I do say I'd like to see Patty make out to do better'n her mother did. She's that handsome she's got a fair right to look high."

"Is it truth, or is it only heard-said, Miss Patience, that young Bradford over to the squire's has been going down to Hackmatac?"

"Well, I don't rightly know. I'm afraid he's got slack ways, has Jim Bradford."

"You can't say he's not a gentlemanly-spoke man, Miss Patience."

"Oh, he's gentlemanly enough's far's that goes! But gentlemen are cheap. Look at the squire. He's a gentleman, but he ain't worth much, all same."

"Jim don't drink like his father 'tany rate."

"No, he don't drink's far's I know. But he hasn't got a speck o' money. And he ain't fore-handed."

"Well, Patty's right smart, ain't she?"

"You'd better believe she's that, Sarah Hobson. She can turn her hand to anything."

"Well, that's the sort of girl for Jim Bradford. She'll keep him straight."

Miss Patience began to tremble.

"Not my girl — not Patty. I don't want she should marry a man she'll have to keep straight. If a woman bears a man's children, ain't it enough? Does she want to carry him on her back too? Not my Patty, Sarah Hobson."

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"Well, Miss Patience," said the other spinster dryly, "I guess your Patty ain't different from other folks' Pattys. I guess she'll throw herself away on the first man asks her, same's they all do. I guess she'll carry him on her back if he wants she should."

It proved to be more than "heard-said" about Jim Bradford and "pretty behaved" Patty Burdock. Presently there was a wedding "to Sister Susan's," at which Miss Patience figured with very red eyes and a nose to match. She had walked the eight long miles to Hackmatac, for, as she remarked to easy-going Joshua Burdock and his agitated wife:

"Everybody was hitched up to come, and I couldn't make out to get a vehicle."

"Lord sakes, woman! why didn't somebody give you a lift?"

Patience Pinger gave the speaker a look which he felt in his slow way to mean something more than he could fathom.

"Joshuary Burdock," she said solemnly, "when I get a ride 'thout askin' for it (and I never asked a favor of nobody yet) it'll be the ride to my own funeral."

"It's a mortal shame," fumed the well-meaning farmer; "I'd have seen to you myself 'f I hadn't s'posed you'd come over with folks."

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Miss Patience gave him another look, and this time Joshua Burdock had an inkling as to her thoughts.

"I'm a lone woman, Joshuay, and used to it. You see to your wife. That's the best *you* can do."

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So Jim Bradford carried Miss Patience's Patty "away out West," which being interpreted meant, in Hindsight, the western part of New York State. The next year Miss Patience had a call to follow, her girl being poorly and the mother being unable to leave her numerous household. It was more like a convulsion of nature than an ordinary departure for the spinster to walk away from her accustomedness with the key of her little domicile in her pocket, and journey to parts unknown. She was even persuaded to wear a new bonnet, a coarse straw, which Mrs. Burdock had provided, only stipulating that she be allowed to resume her accustomed headgear upon her return, should she survive those awful stretches of railroading which lay between Hindsight, fifteen miles from a station, and "Jim Bradford's place."

CHAPTER III

"MOTHER," bawled Abner Lane, bursting into the keeping-room, "Miss Patience Pinger's come back, an' she's wearin' pants."

"What say?" cried his mother sharply.

"I saw Miss Patience Pinger coming across lots, and she's got on pants."

Mrs. Lane stared hard at her young hopeful, whose veracity she was occasionally forced to question.

"I don't believe it."

"Do just as you've a mind to," said the boy sulkily. "All I know is I seen her, and she had on pants."

"What do you mean by pants? What sort of pants?"

"How do I know what sort? You can see for yourself. She's down to Peck's store."

Mrs. Lane reached down her bonnet and shawl from their peg and deliberately marched out of the house, followed surreptitiously by Abner. She went directly to the village store, where she beheld from afar a crowd of men and boys gathered about the door. As she came up they scarcely made way for her. She read in their varied countenances a uniform expression of amazement and mirth, as

though they had been struck one and all by some monstrous and unheard-of joke, (a joke had to be monstrous for Hindsight to perceive it). Without pausing to inquire, she pushed among them and then stood stock-still in the doorway. There, standing in full view of the gibing men, was Miss Patience Pinger — in bloomers; only no one knew they were bloomers, since no such thing had ever been heard of in that small corner of earth.

“For the land’s sake, Patience Pinger, will you tell me what on earth you have got on, and what you mean by masqueradin’ at your time of life, and you a single woman?”

Miss Patience’s face twitched, but she looked her neighbor bravely in the eye.

“There’s folks out West wears ’em. It’s common sense.”

“Common sense, is it? Well, ’tain’t common decency ’tany rate. Do you mean to say the women out to Jim Bradford’s place go about like that? Has Patty Burdock come down to wearin’ pants?”

“No, she hasn’t. Patty hasn’t need to. She’s got Jim to work her garden for her. I’ve got to do men’s chores, and I’ve found there’s a way to dress so’s to make it fittin’.”

“Fittin’! You call that fittin’ — with all these men revilin’ you, as they’ve got a good

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right to? I believe you've gone stark mad, Patience Pinger. You with your gray hair to take up with such new-fangled doin's; you that were so set on old things you couldn't even buy a new bonnet! Don't speak to *me!*" and the irate woman flung herself out of the store amid roars of laughter from the men and boys.

Miss Patience stood still. Her face was white, her mouth rigid.

"Well, I guess I can stand it," she said under her breath, and braced herself to finish her purchases.

When she turned to leave the store it was to face an ordeal that might have made a stouter nerve shrink. But the coarse jests, little short of insults, only made her lift her old head higher and step out like the hero she was, regardless of the ridiculous figure she cut in her linsey-woolsey bloomers and narrow skirt barely reaching the knee.

"If 'twas for religion I could do it, why not for common sense?" she said to herself. Nevertheless the men's laughter was very grievous to her. When the boys followed, hooting, she suffered much as her Puritan mothers must have suffered under like martyrdom before they escaped to the New World. It was the first time she had stirred out since her return, which interval had been occupied

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in fashioning the garments whose utility had appealed to her sense of the thing needful, and the manner of her reception was an unexpected blow to the simple soul. In truth, innovations were so utterly untried at Hind-sight that she had no precedent to prepare her for this universal revolt. Hitherto her little world had upbraided her for desiring no new thing. And now that she had taken upon herself this rational garb, quite unostentatiously, and with no thought of regarding it as a fad or of preaching it as a reform, she was met by an open attack. It was very hard upon her, and it grew worse instead of better. Several of her neighbors came to expostulate with her.

"You'll be looked down on and despised," said one.

"Nobody will have anything to do with you, Patience Pinger," said another.

"It is unlawful, and the church will deal with you," said a third, which presently came to pass. The poor soul was waited on and admonished, and finally requested to absent herself from the Lord's house, her sin being that for a woman to clothe herself in the garments of a man was a stumbling-block in the paths of virtue. All this she bore. But the keenest pang came from her own flesh and blood, as is the way with kith and kin. The

news travelled speedily to Hackmatac, and sister Susan came bursting in upon the lonely spinster, who had as yet not grown accustomed to the bitterness of ostracism.

"Patience Pinger, you get right up out of that chair and let me look you over. I can't seem to believe you've lived to be a disgrace to your family."

Poor Patience got up slowly, her pale face with its drawn mouth and protesting eyes very pitiful to see.

"It's no disgrace, Susan. It ain't for looks, it's only for use" — Her voice died away in a gasp at her sister's furious glare, Susan Burdock's angry face and fiery eyes seeming to the unhappy spinster like the vision of an awful, avenging face seen in a nightmare. Then there went forth one scathing sentence:

"All I've got to say is, if you don't give it up I've darkened your door for the last time. And what's more, you don't never again come near me or mine."

It was all very terrible; but the only tears which Patience Pinger shed were over a letter from her girl. A few weeks after her sister's visit, during which time she had not for a moment wavered in her intention to wear the obnoxious garments and endure the ostracism, — it appealed to her as something to which she had been foreordained, so pre-

cisely did it adapt itself to her sense of the practical,—the letter came which broke her heart.

It was not an affectionate letter. No one to read it would have dreamed the writer to be the one beloved object of the recipient's life, for whose sake she had recently relinquished very nearly all of that "interest" which Hindsight believed her to live upon. . . . "I guess you had better not come out here again, like we were planning," finished Patty's letter, "because neither me nor Jim can abide bloomers. You never said a word about wearing them when you was to our house. It don't seem respectable, no-ways, and I guess you had better give it up. It is very hard Jim should feel disgraced by one of my family, and I'm sorry I ever ast you out."

But Miss Patience did not give it up. She lived her lonely, ostracized existence for ten long years, taking in garments to make from the one clothing-house of the village to eke out the meagre income she had divided with Patty. Sometimes her resources grew so low that she trembled lest one day she should "come upon the town." Often she was stinted in fuel; always she was only half nourished. The neighbors never came near her. Susan and her children were gone from her life. In all Hindsight, only Uncle Otis Gif-

ford noticed her. But she worked on stolidly, sewing the coarse "store-made" clothes, and digging and planting her meagre little garden whenever the boys forgot to molest her. One day the butcher's man, stopping to leave the one small pound that Miss Patience indulged in each week, failed to get a response to his lusty knocking. He called next at Deacon Lane's and persuaded the deacon's wife to go over and make inquiries.

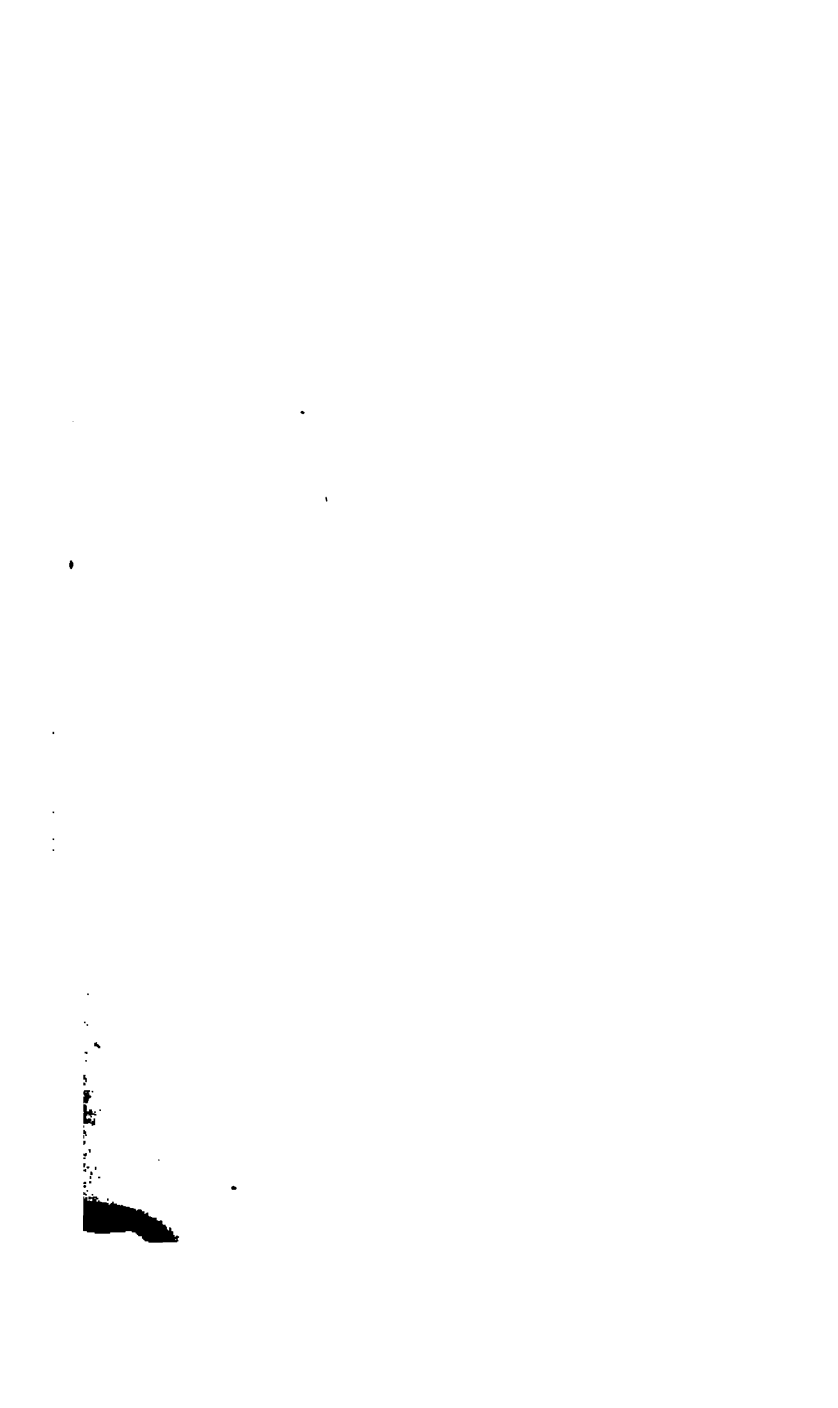
Poor Miss Patience! She had died "of a stroke" in the night. There she lay stark and stiff in her bed, with the despised bloomers spread out beside her, ready for the morning which never came.

"She sha'n't be buried in 'em, no-way," sobbed Susan, shedding tears of remorse as well as grief while performing the last rites of dressing for burial. "She shall go to Judgment decent, whether or no."

And when the small, homely funeral was over, Mrs. Burdock tied up the long-offending costume in a meal-sack, and with a big stone vicariously sunk her dead sister's social lapse in the mill-pond.



**SKETCHES OF A HINDSIGHT
PHILOSOPHER**



SKETCHES OF A HINDSIGHT PHILOSOPHER

"O great and beautiful Soul; with whom nothing turns to bitterness; who art peremptory only in duty and benevolence!"

I

UNCLE OTIS'S OPINION OF NATURE

OTIS GIFFORD was regarded by Hindsight as its philosopher. It was in the way-back days, when Patience Pinger had set her poor, unappreciated old face for nearly ten years against the tide of Hindsight prejudice, that he added gladioli to his wonderful garden. Now this garden was the pride of the village. There were lilac bushes all down one side of the half-acre lot; and down the other great, sumptuous sunflowers and hollyhocks. Following the front fence stood rows upon rows of rose bushes and lily stalks, the white and pink alternating when there chanced to be a simultaneous

bloom. This was not always; for growing things counted closely their seasons in Hind-sight, and stuck sternly to their appointed times in spite of Uncle Otis's coaxing. New England flowers, like the people, aspire to no wasteful luxury of perpetual bud and blossom.

"Them orange trees in Floridy, now; they might try some sech high-falutin' notions of bearin' fruit and flowers all to once," remarked Uncle Otis sagely; "but you ain't going to get a common-sense Noo England apple tree to commit any sech extravagance. And I tell you what 'tis, Miss Patience: when a good hard frost makes the mistake of goin' South it grips them silly orange trees all to pieces, while our apple trees — land! they don't pay any more 'tention to a straight-along-three-months-freeze-up than nothin' at all! Why, they acshally seem to enjoy it! And it's the same with flowers. I'm told that way down in Floridy, where they're too lazy to raise anything but darkeys and watermelons, if you was to stick anything into good dirt it ud spring up and go to blooming in a week's time. It's a quality in the sun an' air, I calc'late. But it don't work, Miss Patience. Now look at Floridy fields and meddars — as bare's your hand, I'm told, spite o' that s'prisin' quality in the sun an' air. Not a blade of real grass to be seen any-

where. And why? *There ain't a mite o' good dirt in the hull State."*

Miss Patience mumbled something in the pause, but Uncle Otis was off again directly:

"Don't that show nature won't countenance any sech redickerlous ways? Give me good stony Noo England soil, that you have to go down on your knees to and pick over same's if you was sortin' gold at a mine, and rake and hoe and manure and water. That's the sort of ground you get the worth of your labor from. Why for? You can't take your hands off it. You've got to keep right along diggin' an' delvin' at it, and the weeds don't have a chance to speckerlate, 'cause of yer vigilance."

"Well," said Miss Patience, "I guess I'd just as lief have my garden sass grow without such a heft of work."

"No, Miss Patience," insisted the philosopher; "it's the sweat of the farmer's brow saves his crops. 'Tain't this all-fired rich soil as sends up wheat an' tares altogether in a night; nor 'tain't the sun an' air o' Floridy as has only sand to work on. *The lilies of the field know what's due 'em.* Look at them gladioluses, Miss Patience." For the crowning triumph of Uncle Otis's garden was the double row of many-colored gladioli newly imported from Boston. They bordered the

narrow path leading from his pitched-roof, salt-box cottage to a little gate opening upon the village street; and to Uncle Otis their glory was as the glory of the seraphim and cherubim. No one else grew them; and Hindsight got off one of its rare jokes, calling him henceforth Uncle Gladi-Otis, which cognomen he wore as though it were a crown.

In the long sad term of her ostracism, which ended only with Patience Pinger's life, the gentle old man stood her friend, supporting her when present, defending her when absent.

"Well, why?" demanded Uncle Otis of Welcome Bodfish, the pessimist, with whom he occasionally hobnobbed of a summer evening. "What's reason Patience Pinger can't wear what she's a mind to without all the women, and men too, more's the shame, runnin' her to earth like a hunted fox? S'pose she does wear pants — I'm told the women of the east wear pants: the Turks and Chinese and Persians, and a lot more 'o them tribes that wore garments when our ancestors was runnin' naked in the forests. What if I wanted to wear petticoats, as I'm told the men do in them very same half-civilized lands? You'd go to stonin' me like as not, now wouldn't ye, Welcome?"

"A woman's a fool to run up against con-

ventions," growled Welcome Bodfish. "It ain't accordin' to nature."

Uncle Otis was up and on his hobby in a minute:

"Well, nature ain't so uncompromising as you may think. Else these here apple trees," waving his right hand to a charming old orchard of gnarled and twisted trees that adjoined the garden, "couldn't suck juice out of rocks, nor them there orange trees," waving his left hand vaguely towards the south, "couldn't draw high flavorin' out of dry sand. I swan, Welcome Bodfish, if nature bean't everlastin'ly accommodatin' — within her limits — within her limits! Why can't folks do same?"

Uncle Gladi-Otis's affinity with growing things pervaded all his modes of thought, and showed itself lovingly in all his figures of speech. A rose to him was a sonnet to God. An acorn was an essay on life. When he spoke at prayer meetings he revelled in those Bible metaphors wherein man is made to flourish as a green bay tree, or to wither as grass, according to the symbol chosen or the application made. One memorable evening he waxed so eloquent as to somewhat confuse his audience.

"Paul may plant," said he, in that awed tone which Hindsight employed for scriptural quotation, "and Apollos may water, but the

Lord giveth the increase. And I know, beloved, that if I can water my brother from that situation in life whereto I am called I shall be watered in return."

II

UNCLE OTIS UPHOLDS MISS PATIENCE

IT was not often Uncle Otis could persuade the forlorn, solitary spinster to pay a visit to his garden. But the mild light of his liberal views shone like a stray sunbeam upon her withered heart.

"Why, I kinder like 'em, Miss Patience," he would say, looking askance at the despised scanty garments to which no bloomer of to-day would have acknowledged kinship. "I guess they're a heap more sightly than the rag-tags some women trail behind 'em when their skirts are too long for their legs. Look at Josiah Forbes's wife. See her last Sabbath in that rarin' gown she walked to meetin' into?"

"No," said Miss Patience meekly; "I don't seem to go to meetin' much these days."

Of course Uncle Otis knew that Patience Pinger had been suspended from the privi-

leges of the sisters in Israel, and Patience knew that he knew; but the poor little phrase helped her.

"Well, Miss Patience, between you an' me you don't miss no great. Parson Pickup ain't what he was. Not that he ever was much of a preacher; but he could make out to holler some when he was younger. And now I'm blamed if his voice ain't gettin' that weak an' cracked-like, you couldn't hear him a quarter of a mile off, not if he was shoutin' right out doors."

"I heard him Sunday week from my back winder," remarked Miss Patience.

"Did ye, though? Well, what folks want of a preacher is to make himself heard. 'Tain't so much what he says as how he says it. The Scriptur language's bound to be all right; but it takes tremenjous force to bring out the application. If a man can't holler right smart he oughten to stand up in a pulpit, no-ways. 'Tain't any use to depend on poundin' the cushions. It jest makes the dust fly, and don't amount to nothin', after all. If I could hear him from my orchard I wouldn't go to meetin' neither. I'd a sight ruther set out-doors and study the Lord's ways first hand."

Uncle Gladi-Otis was the confidant of all Hindsight in matters of sentiment. His long

living alone with his flowers had enveloped him in an atmosphere of gentle superiority to his more commonplace neighbors. When business matters were to be discussed, and sound advice asked, the village went to Deacon Adams. But for all questions relating to the conduct of life it appealed to Otis Gifford, the tolerant. One evening Miss Patience opened for the last time her shrinking heart, in the midst of the flaunting glad-ioli.

"I wouldn't mind so much, Mr. Gifford, if 'twan't for Patty Bradford. All Hindsight might go agen me, yes, and Hackmatac too, though I was awful fond of Sister Susan's family. But when Patty writ me that letter" — the seared face worked painfully, bringing to light a new set of contending wrinkles.

Otis Gifford's mild blue eyes shot forth a wrathful light.

"Never you mind, Miss Patience. She ain't worth it. You have more real woman-kindness in you, spite of your pants, than she's got, by a long sight. If she ain't got the soul to look above yer bloomers, after what you've done for her, all I can say is, whatever she writ wa'n't worth the readin', let alone your taking it so to heart. Have this bunch of red gladioluses?"

"No, thank 'e," said Miss Patience ner-

vously. "Truth is, Uncle Otis, I've got somethin' onto my mind, an' I'm bound to tell it to somebody. I guess you're about as good as any."

"That's right, Miss Patience. There's nothin' like outspeakin' to get a heft off your mind. Things don't seem half so bad when you see 'em out of other folks' eyes."

After a strained pause Miss Patience began to speak in sharp, short sentences that were jerked from her by the dire necessity of relieving her conscience.

"I dono's you know Deacon Adams and the rest raised fifty dollars off the town to pay me for dryin' my well. They drained it when they cut that new road last year."

Of course Uncle Otis knew all about it. In fact, his was the moving spirit that had induced the city fathers to repair the injury done the ostracized woman's poor little property.

"Yes," he said cheerily. "Yes, Miss Patience, I'm told they've done the right thing by ye, after all."

"It had to be dug deeper, so's to let the water flow back," pursued Miss Patience doggedly, as though reiterating a disputed fact.

"So it did, Miss Patience. In justice, so it did. For why? They changed the lay of

the land so's your spring had to have another tappin'."

"And they calc'lated," Miss Patience went on stolidly, "on its costin' fifty dollars to dig that well."

"Well, wa'n't it enough?" demanded Uncle Otis anxiously. "I told 'em they'd oughter make it seventy-five."

"I guess 'twas enough," said Miss Patience a little breathlessly; "but I put it in bank — every cent."

"Did you, though? Now reely! Then the well ain't dug?"

"Yes, it's dug. I dug it myself."

Patience Pinger jerked out the melancholy disclosure as though it had been some awful revelation. Uncle Otis was too suddenly taken aback to conceal his very natural astonishment. He could only ejaculate "Now reely!" once or twice. But Miss Patience, now that she had relieved her conscience, spoke up firm and strong in her own defence:

"I'll tell you how 'twas, Uncle Otis. You know how folks has treated me this ten year come November, all along o' my wearin' bloomers. Now what did I put 'em on for? 'Twa'n't fashion: 'twas common sense. Because I had to work my garden and do men's chores. So when that spell of diggin'

came along, I sez to myself, sez I: 'Patience Pinger, you're nothin' if you're not consistent. You go to work and dig out that there well jes' to prove you ain't made a mistake in stickin' to pants through thick and thin. What's the sense of sacrificin' every last friend you'd got for bloomers,' sez I to myself, 'if they're not goin' to serve you a turn as'll save that fifty dollars 'gainst yer old age?'"

Uncle Otis had recovered his balance, and adjusted himself with characteristic alacrity to the new point of view:

"Of course, Miss Patience, of course! But wa'n't it an awful job for a lone woman?"

"Not a bit of it! I had only to go seven feet. *But I'd have dug it out if I'd had to dig clear through to Chiny!*"

After poor Miss Patience died Uncle Otis remembered gratefully that her worn face had taken a momentary look of triumph as she turned away.

III

UNCLE OTIS CONSOLES THE AFFLICTED

IT was not only philosophy that Hindsight asked and received of Otis Gifford. A lonely man, with no one upon whom to spend his meagre income, must have an accumulation "unbeknownst." And so charity was demanded at his hands as the right of those who were fain to exist, even in New England, without adequate personal effort. He had no story of his own. But he heard with sympathy the story of every one with whom he came in contact. There was no climax in his simple pastoral. But with the development of others' lives his experience was enriched.

The sorrowing sought and found in him substantial aid as well as consolation. When 'Mandy Plummer's husband died there were those who repudiated the idea that the widow would be greatly afflicted at the loss of her lord and master.

"She ain't one of them that's bereaved," said Miss Thankful, who was Aaron Plummer's first cousin. "She's more like to feel herself released. 'Mandy never did think much of the bonds."

"Well, I guess you wouldn't hanker after the bonds if you knew more about 'em, Miss Thankful," remarked Mrs. Josiah Forbes. "I guess you've never had to put up with men's capers and don't rightly surmise anything about married women's hardships. Why should 'Mandy grieve after Aaron Plummer? She's got him safe, now he's dead. *She knows where he spends his evenings.*"

But 'Mandy Plummer, womanlike, mourned the loss of an indifferent husband very keenly at first.

"Oh, Uncle Gladi-Otis," she sobbed, "howsomever I'm to get along, and keep respectable, I can't make out! I thought Aaron Plummer had got an everlasting grip onto life, and now he's up and died and left me to struggle with the children and the farm. I can't seem to see the Lord's hand in it."

"Well, 'Mandy," said the philosopher gently, "you've set out to be a reel pious woman, and it don't seem's if you an' the Lord ought to come to words over this first affliction. He's promised He won't forget the widow and the fatherless."

"I s'pose not," wailed 'Mandy; "but it's money I need and not promises. Promises ain't no great."

"Silver an' gold are no use to a body if they can't ketch ahold of the Lord's prom-

ises, 'Mandy. But I'll send you a barrel flour right off for a start."

"Mercy on me! you're the best friend I've got. I'm terrible obliged, but — but" —

She broke off hysterically. Otis Gifford endured patiently:

"Well, 'Mandy, what is it? Mebbe there's somethin' else you'd ruther have. You can speak right out."

"Oh, no, no! Flour's reel hearty and more fillin' than most things; but oh! Uncle Gladi-Otis, a bar'el flour ain't a husband, you know." And Mrs. Plummer fell to weeping violently. Her immediate necessities supplied, she could afford to give way to a more personal emotion.

IV

UNCLE OTIS PROTECTS THE BACKSLIDING

THE tender-hearted old bachelor, emerging from the fragrant places of his garden, seemed never amiss in any domestic crisis. "What Uncle Gladi-Otis can't smooth over's 'way past helpin'," was the verdict of his fellow-townsmen.

A particularly shiftless old farmer, who subsisted feebly by the hard labor of his wife, was Mindwell Price. He had been shot in

the shoulder while in ignominious retreat at the battle of Bull Run, and was the hero of a yearly pension of one hundred dollars. This stipend was drawn each six months; and it became the urgent business of his Melindy to watch for the hour of that semi-annual triumph and claim it as her own in part payment for her husband's support. Not that Mindwell was disabled by his wound. He was incapacitated for work partly by a shiftless temper, partly by the glory of the pension.

But one day Melindy miscalculated the precise moment when her spouse slipped into Lawyer Burke's little one-roomed office and slipped out with the price of his masterly retreat in his pocket. He was missing all afternoon, and when he shambled in at supper time he met the hard, keen look of inquiry with a vague and shifty glance.

"Yer sharp set for yer supper, ain't yer?" she demanded suspiciously, as he sidled into his place.

"Well, I guess I wouldn't mind some o' that pie we had this mornin', Melindy," he remarked with a propitiatory grin.

"There wa'n't any left over. Pie gets eat up whether or no. Where's that money?"

"See here, Melindy. I guess folks don't come to table to jaw. Let's eat and be done with it."

"You'll have to fetch 'round to it sooner or later, Mindwell Price. Ye might's well up and tell it to once. Where's the money?"

The ne'er-do-weel gave his capable spouse a sickly smile as he fumbled at his trousers pocket.

"There's somethin' better'n dollars an' cents, to my mind, Melindy," he began weakly.

"See here, Mindwell Price, I'm a sight too knowin' to be caught with sech chaff. What d'ye do with the money?"

Slowly and reluctantly there was drawn from the capacious overalls a huge gold-cased watch of ancient make which Mindwell held up solemnly, the chain dangling and bobbing as his hand shook uncertainly.

"'Twas a reg'lar bargain, Melindy. It's worth a heap more'n fifty dollars."

The hard-working woman collapsed suddenly into her chair. The blow to her frugal nature was unspeakable. Her husband, who had long ceased to realize by the severity of labor the value of money, was utterly unable to comprehend the quality of his crime.

"Why, Melindy, ye don't feel reel bad, do yer? There'll be 'nother fifty, come next July" —

She drew her breath hard and tight. Something seemed to choke her. She waved

him aside with her gaunt arms when he brought her some water, trembling.

"It was for — the rent," she whispered hoarsely; "we're awful behindhand. An' there's nothin' down cellar to eat; and the children's shoes are wore out — I've been countin' on every cent of that money" —

She began to sob in hard, dry gasps, but no tears came to her relief. The children set up a whimper; and Mary Ann, the eldest, said something in a scornful tone about men being chuckle-headed.

"That's so, Mary Ann," said poor Mindwell, still holding aloft the forgotten watch. "Men don't have's much faculty's women, no-ways. Melindy always was my s'perior."

Here a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Uncle Otis, whose arrival at the nick of time had the effect of "bringing to" the unhappy woman. When the tragedy of the watch was revealed he found golden words of wisdom to pacify the suffering burden bearer.

"Well, Mis' Price, I'll say this for't. There's a lot of human nature in men. They're always up to somethin'. It's what women are bound to have religion for. Don't think you're the only one as has to look out fur their tricks. What d'ye guess Welcome Bodfish's wife has to bear?"

Melindy Price finished the "coming to" process with a snort.

"See here, Mr. Gifford," she said sternly; "because Eliza Bodfish dassent call her soul her own one minute, is that any reason why I should work for a poor circumwentious critter as hasn't spunk enough to pay me for his victuals and drink when Gov'ment undertakes to put the money right under his nose? Look at that tomfool watch!"

Uncle Gladi-Otis examined it with portentous gravity, eying the thing sideways, like a ruminating hen, as was his habit when perplexed.

"Well, it's not an ord'nary watch, Mis' Price. I dono's I ever see a watch like that. It's a priv'lige jest to handle it."

"What's it good for?" demanded Melindy, sitting up straight. "Does it keep good time?"

"N-no," responded Mindwell hesitatingly. "It ain't kep' time lately, I guess. It's a anteek, Melindy."

"A what?"

"A anteek," he began, stammering helplessly, but Uncle Otis was equal to the occasion.

"It's one of those articles whose value goes on increasin' as their usefulness decreases. If it lasts long enough, Mis' Price, that watch'll be a fortune to your posterity."

"Melindy," asked Mindwell timidly, yet straightening himself a little at the turn affairs were taking, "What'll I do with it?"

Melinda Price rose and began marshalling her forces for the evening meal by silently putting a chair to table for their visitor.

"What'll I do with it, Melindy?" again asked her dubious spouse.

"Do with it? Well, I guess you'd best hang it in the pork bar'el. It's empty clean to the bottom. Set up, Mr. Gifford, an' I'll fetch you some pie."

Dear Uncle Gladi-Ötis, the kind and gentle-souled, whom even the rougher elements of Hindsight touched with a tender hand and long remembered with a loving heart! He was a Christian, not after the manner of his Puritan forbears, but in a mild, yielding fashion of his own that made his life conform unconsciously to the life of Him who went about doing good.

The influence of one such tender soul softened the rigor of those village annals. Who that knew him could doubt the possibilities of regenerate human nature? For amid the stern winter of Hindsight's discontent this nature kept perpetual summer at its core.



ACHSAH BODFISH'S HALLUCI- NATION



ACHSAH BODFISH'S HALLUCINATION

"Nothing in this world is hidden forever. The gold which has lain for centuries unsuspected in the ground reveals itself one day on the surface. Sand turns traitor and betrays the footstep that has pressed it; water gives back to the tell-tale surface the body that has been drowned. Fire itself leaves the confession in ashes of the substance consumed in it. Hate breaks its prison secrecy through the doorway of the eyes. Love finds the Judas who betrays it by a kiss.

"Look where we will, the inevitable law of revelation is one of the laws of nature; the lasting preservation of a secret is a miracle which the world has not yet seen."

Wilkie Collins.

I

"WHAT'S Axey going to do?"

"About what?"

"About getting her living, now old Welcome's dead?"

"Well, I guess she'll do same's other women do that haven't anybody to do for them. I guess she'll go to work."

"Dear me, Mrs. Foster; a body to hear you talk might s'pose all women didn't have to work — leastways, nearly all."

The person addressed gave the speaker a sharp look over her spectacles and detected, or thought she did, an insinuation.

"See here, Thankey Plummer, I know what you're driving at same's if you'd said it outright. You think because I've got a husband I don't have to work for my living. I'll tell you once for all, you're misinformed. If bakin' and brewin' and sweepin' and dustin' from morning till night, and cookin' for the hands and sewin' for the children, and waitin' on the men folks every turn, ain't workin' for your living, I'd like to know what is. Let Abijah Foster hire a woman from outside to do all that for him and his, week in and week out, and see if she don't think she's earned her victuals; yes,

and her wages too, which is more than I get out of it."

"Well, I didn't mean exactly that," began Miss Thankful, but the other snapped her up.

"Yes, you did, Thankey Plummer, and you're not the first that's cast it in my teeth I've got it easier than most, and jest because I ain't obliged to piece bed-quilts and braid woollen mats, and all the rest of it. I guess if you had to get along with Abijah Foster, you'd think 'twas a heap harder than piecing bed-quilts for a living."

"Well," said Miss Thankful, again anxious to divert the conversation, "all I've got to say is, I'm sorry for Axey Bodfish. She's that weak and helpless she couldn't stand real hard work, and she's so peckish about her eating she's got to be fed decent some-way."

"It's likely she'll eat about according as she earns," remarked Mrs. Foster dryly; "but I always did s'pose Welcome Bodfish had put by a little money. He was that near, it didn't seem's if he could have spent everything on himself and Axey, though she were so over-nice about her vittles."

Miss Thankful sighed sympathetically.

"It's a good riddance, in some respects. Axey'll have a soul of her own, even if she don't have any money. I reckon she's some

disappointed, though, for she did count on getting something when the old man died."

Achsah Bodfish was in truth much put about to secure a means of livelihood. For thirty years she had endured a hard, pinched existence with "old Welcome Bodfish," whose name belied his nature insomuch as nobody was ever made welcome within his dwelling. But it had not been the sort of pinching that comes of hunger, for the Bodfishes were all "good feeders." Rather had her privations been the sort of stinting which is the lot of those who are under the dominion of a hard, mean-natured man. She was unhappily devoid of that physical endurance which enables most New England women of her class to bear their burden of hewing wood and drawing water without much assistance from outside. But of spiritual grit, Achsah Bodfish had no lack. Her soul was sternly set upon doing her duty, and strenuously given over to rectitude. Her honesty and truth were of the unflinching order which neither maketh nor knoweth a white lie. Yet in her self-expression she was painfully timorous, owing to her life of repression and avoidance of conflict with her domestic tyrant. Though comparatively young in years, she was old in endurance. She was the embodiment of neatness and order, while

Welcome belonged to that class of mankind to whom dirt and disorder are no affliction.

"God preserve us from a dirty old man," said Mrs. Foster one day before the person in question had betaken his slovenly ways into the other life. "Men ain't very interesting anyway, when you see 'em near to, particularly old men. If they'll keep clean and spry, it's best they can do."

II

TWO or three generations back, a lawyer of high repute had come out of Hind-sight. Not that he made his reputation within its narrow precincts; but in his failing years, his memory had wandered back to the old home, and when his turn came to be gathered to his fathers, he was brought to the little flat, ugly, roadside burying-ground where the village laid its dead. Then it was found he had bequeathed his library to his native township, with a sufficiently good legacy to buy a small building and pay a small stipend for the care of the books. These were nearly all dry legal works, dryer doctrinal works, with a sprinkling of the driest sciences, all of the most obsolete description. Readable books there were none.

Welcome Bodfish had had a tolerably good education for his place and generation, and this fact, together with his sedentary habits and the tastes of a recluse, led Hindsight to choose him for the custodian of this much-valued if utterly unavailable gift. For thirty years his life had been spent in the musty rooms whose floors were seldom swept, whose windows were seldom raised, whose shelves were seldom dusted.

In the early days of his custodianship, when Axey was a young girl and less in dread of her father's sordid ways, she had been used to beg the boon of dusting those untouched upper shelves where were mustered the scores upon scores of volumes of sermons it had been the defunct lawyer's whim to collect. What awful prophecies, what scathing denunciations, what blood-curdling warnings, were bound up between their covers probably no one ever knew, not even their late owner. But for many years they had stood in formidable and forgotten array, the dust that had long ago whitened their shelves beginning to lend a gentle grayness to their black bindings and startling titles.

In turning over her possible means of support, Achsah Bodfish bethought herself of her father's vacated post. And as the vague aroma of undefined scholarship was somehow


supposed to have descended upon the daughter (who, by the way, had never read anything except her Bible, her shorter catechism, and her "Pilgrim's Progress"), the office of custodian to the Free Library was duly bestowed upon the deserving spinster, whose gratitude was out of all proportion to the situation. Then duly began a slow but sure process of "cleaning up," which commenced at the foot-soiled floor and was to mount triumphantly to the time-stained ceiling.

It must be confessed that Miss Achsah, as Hindsight now began to call her, was sorely perplexed in her own mind as to what secrets of profit and loss could have absorbed her father's little salary, which, meagre as it was, she could not realize had in the slow course of years been expended upon their frugal living. When the "little money" she had counted on was not forthcoming, she felt that the relief in calling her soul her own was too much hampered with uncertainty about her bodily needs to be of great advantage. She relinquished the tiny three-roomed dwelling that had known the sorrows and deprivations of her whole life, and went to live in two upper chambers intended for the purpose in the small Free Library building.

The "cleaning up" went on day by day and week by week. Miss Achsah, who was

as strong in nervous energy as she was weak in body, was harassed by a secret dread as to what employment she would find when the shelves were all scrubbed and the bindings all polished. She even contemplated a future process of turning the leaves of each volume, page by page, and wiping the invisible dust of ages from their slowly rusting chapters. But this was to be the resource of coming years when she grew intolerably weary of waiting for the reader who never came.

"My land!" she sometimes sighed, looking about her with wistful regret, "how lonesome poor father must have been!" And she forgave him many failings by which he had embittered her life. Almost no one approached the Free Library. Applicants for books there had been none for years. And the neighbors who would have been glad enough to drop in at her old home for an odd hour between the kneading and the rising of the dough, were too averse to doing an unaccustomed thing to climb the steps that led to an environment totally outside of their knowledge of facts. Miss Achsah, while yet in her first month of office, felt herself to be gradually stiffening into the rigid similitude of her surroundings, until she realized that instead of possessing a new sense of freedom,




her existence was being shut in between the walls of the dismal little place as between the covers of one of those unread books. She realized that she had made a mistake. Now Achsah Bodfish was always making mistakes. She had a clumsy way of doing the wrong thing, although her actions were invariably governed by a desire to do the right thing. But she must abide by the course she had marked out for herself, even though she turned into a fossil as her father before her had done.

She had got half way around the topmost shelf, clinging with her thin fingers as she stood upon a not-too-reliable ladder that swayed alarmingly with the lifting up and down of every pile of antiquated volumes, when her hand touched something. It was a small pile of money—a hoard of gold and silver, with a roll of bank-notes. For a second her heart stood still; then it gave a great bound and she clutched the unexpected treasure. Like a dart there went through her mind an intangible recollection of something her father had once said about "Zekiel Plummer's queer way of hiding things down to the Free Library." The money had lain so long behind the musty books that a little cloud of dust rose and set her coughing as she feverishly gathered the pile in her two hands.

She even forgot to steady herself by holding to the shelf, as she groped about the inaccessible place, that none of the long undiscovered miser's hoard should be overlooked.

Miss Achsah was aware that the Free Library had not immediately been given over to dust and desolation. In the first years of its acquisition, Hindsight had tried to make use of the privilege not possessed by its neighboring townships. It had held up its advantage over Hackmatac and talked much of the superior possession. There were young men who had tried to study law there, and others who had endeavored to read medicine. There had been that unhappy spirit — the eccentric brother of Thankful Plummer — who had begun the study of theology among those terrible tomes. But what he found must have still farther unsettled his mind, for he relinquished all thought of preaching the gospel, and died soon after of his mental disorder. The money was hidden behind a set of Dr. Bagwell's sermons, and Miss Achsah remembered swiftly that there had been some question of money mixed up with 'Zekiel Plummer's insanity. What it was she had never known or had forgotten. As she scrambled down the ladder, grasping the gold and silver in her hands,—the bank-



notes she had thrust in her bosom,—there rose before her a distinct picture of the unbalanced young man poring furtively over a book of sermons in which he seemed to be hiding something. Then the apparition vanished. What should she do? The original trustees who had received the Free Library gift in the name of the town were all dead, and her appointment had come by common consent of Deacon Adams, Abijah Foster, and Ebenezer Jones, who were self-made guardians of this fund. 'Zekiel Plummer was dead, and that sudden picture which started up was but a thing of her own conjuring from the gloomy shadows of the place.

She put on her bonnet quickly and went to find Deacon Adams, who was considered, by virtue of his great age, to be the wisest person in the community, although in reality he possessed but little real shrewdness.

She had no definite plan of action, and still clutching the money in her fists, she came upon the old man, sunning himself in the pleasant autumn sunshine by his open door. He rose slowly to greet his guest, with a prim politeness that savored of reproof. Miss Achsah scarcely answered his greeting.

"See here, Deacon Adams," she began, holding out her hands that trembled with excitement; "look what I've found in the

Libr'y, on the top shelf, behind some books, covered with dust."

The old man adjusted his glasses and peered at the outstretched hands and at Miss Achsah's agitated face. Then he said in his automatic way:

"Come in, Miss Axey."

She followed him nervously.

"How much is it, did you say?"

"I don't know. I haven't counted it."

"Well, hadn't you better sit down and count it?"

Miss Achsah dropped suddenly into a chair, and unclosing her cramped fingers as though they were worked by steel springs, let the money fall upon the table.

Deacon Adams stared.

"It looks like a sight of money."

"I guess likely 'tis."

"Hadn't you better count it?" he again suggested.

She made a gesture indicating her unwillingness to handle the treasure, and the old man began slowly to count the specie, putting it in little piles representing ten dollars each. There were many such piles, and many twenty-dollar gold pieces besides. Then he counted the whole amount laboriously three times over. There were six hundred and twenty dollars and fifty cents.

III

THE two sat and looked at the money and then at each other.

"Well?" said the deacon, "what you going to do about it?"

The unfailing New England query fell unheeded on Miss Achsah's ears. She was devouring the money with her eyes and thinking were some of it to become her own how soon she would part with the Free Library she had mistakenly chosen as her fate.

"Well?" questioned the deacon again, regarding her wistful face disapprovingly.

"My land!" said Miss Achsah, starting guiltily, "I don't know as I know what's to be done."

"Who d'you s'pose put it there, Miss Axey?"

Miss Achsah shook her head. There was no reason why she should tell any one of that strange vision of 'Zekiel Plummer. Moreover, she was not communicative and the visions had, after, all been but a freak of her own fancy.

"I wonder how long it's been there?"

"A long while, I should say. There was a sight of dust onto it."

"I guess," said the old man slowly, "if no

one comes forward to claim it, it belongs to the Free Library."

"I guess so."

"Well, I s'pose it had ought to be advertised."

"I s'pose so."

"Hadn't you better 'tend to it, Miss Axey?"

"Me? Oh, no!" she answered hurriedly.

"I'd much rather you took charge of it, Deacon Adams, if — if it b'longs to the Lib'r'y."

She was moving away when the deacon stopped her. He slowly shoved towards her along the table the extra fraction of a dollar.

"Seem's if you might's well have the fifty cents for finding it, Miss Axey."

Her face flushed scarlet.

"Oh, no — no!" she cried half hysterically; "I don't want the — fifty cents."

And she fled back to her solitary abode, brushing by the half-open door of the unused reading-room to gain her own chamber. As she did so, the figure of a man seemed to be standing upon the step-ladder she had left, rummaging among the theological books. The back was that of 'Zekiel Plummer.

"How shall I ever make out to live right along here in this lonesome place with — with *That*?" she thought, shivering, as she took off her bonnet. Then she sat down in a


dazed way to reflect. All of a sudden she recollected the little roll of bank-notes she had thrust into her bosom, and drew it out hastily. Unrolling it, a look of consternation overspread her face. There were two bills for two hundred dollars each, and one for five hundred, besides a few tens and fives. In all, they amounted to a thousand dollars.

To say that Achsah Bodfish was shocked would be to understate her emotions. Her breath came short; her throat was dry. Why had she kept back that enormous sum of money—hidden away forgotten in her bosom? How had she come to put it there and forget it? And what would Deacon Adams think of her? Then came another reflection. What had Deacon Adams to do with it? Was it not she who found the money? And was not she the proper person, after all, to keep it until the rightful owner should appear? Suppose no rightful owner appeared, what claim had the Free Library to it? If one found money on the street, and could discover no claimant, did the money belong to the street? She sat there, arguing the matter with herself for a long while, not realizing that she was putting her righteous soul into an unrighteous predicament. Her conclusion was that she had best use every means in her power to find the

person who had hidden the silver and gold behind Dr. Bagwell's sermons. To him alone she would render up the bank-notes.

It was another of poor Achsah's blunders; but it was made in good faith, and for a while the question of right and wrong was dormant in her brain.

She put the bills in an envelope, determined to carry it always in her bosom, fearing to lose that which she held in trust for some unknown person. She continued her daily routine of renovation, scrubbing the last shelf and polishing the last binding. One day the wrath of 'Zekiel Plummer seemed to emerge from the shadowy place and stand beside her, giving her a mournful look before he vanished. From that moment her conscience took fright and began to torment her. She would gladly have handed the money over to Deacon Adams, but it was too late. Advertisements had gone far and wide through the local newspaper, but no one had come forward to claim even a knowledge of the concealed treasure. Several of Hindsight's ruling townsmen, who had the town's good at heart, began to talk of a purchase of new books — modern books — readable books — for the Library. Then came one evening to Miss Achsah's tiny living-room, Deacon Adams, Abijah Foster, and Ebenezer Jones, and



wanted to consult her, partly as custodian and partly as finder of the money, about the proposed purchase. She listened vaguely to their long-winded phrases about the necessity of a careful selection, and then said timidly :

"Well, I dono's I know much about books. I'm no great reader myself. But don't you think we might get a carpet for the reading-room, and chairs and a table " —

"Not if I know it," cried Abijah Foster. "'Tain't luxury we're after. We're not proposing to pomper the people of Hindsight. What we want to do is to improve them. If they don't care enough for books to make use of them without tables and chairs, we'd best send the money down to Hackmatac."

So Miss Achsah sat dumb, and offered no further advice. In truth, she knew no more of literature than the deacon himself, and could only reiterate at every suggestion :

"Of course that'll be all right if you think so, Deacon Adams."

This discussion of a final disposition of part of the mysterious money made her possession of the larger portion an added torment to her honest soul. The bank notes in her bosom seemed to burn into the flesh.

When her neighbors had gone, she took out the envelope and looked at them. She felt like Hester Prynne with the shame of her

scarlet letter; but as she had not read Hawthorne's story, she was spared the similitude. The apparition of 'Zekiel Plummer now haunted her continually, and made her life in the dismal place a daily anguish. The awful warnings and prophecies in the black books seemed to force their way through the forbidding covers and confront her like so many personified maledictions.


She lay awake all night, one night, racked with self-torture. In the morning she hurried out to see Miss Thankful Plummer, who looked up from her mat-braiding, surprised at her unusual visitor.

"Miss Thankey," she began abruptly, "I want to know if there wa'n't some money trouble your brother 'Zekiel got into before he died."

Miss Thankful's face was a study in astonishment and indignation.

"What right have you got to ask such a question, Achsah Bodfish?" she demanded wrathfully.

"Oh, Miss Thankey," cried poor Achsah, "please don't be put out. I only wanted to say I'd somehow got it into my head how that money as was found up to the Free Libr'y might have been put there by him. Father said he used to spend a lot of time there, readin' and studyin' theology, and all



that; and I found the money right up behind all those old books " —

" See here, Achsah Bodfish ! " interrupted the other grimly; " whatever trouble my poor brother got into, it isn't for you to accuse him of hiding away other folks' money " —

But Miss Achsah broke forth piteously:

" My land ! I've gone and made another blunder. I didn't think 'twas other folks' money — I thought 'twas his own, and, somehow, I seem to see him sitting around " —

" 'Twa'n't his own, for he hadn't any," cut in Miss Thankful. " And if you keep seeing queer things up to that dull place by yourself, I can't help that. All I've got to say is, it's a poor return for my taking your part when old Welcome died." It was little short of an accusation of murder. Miss Achsah crept away, still carrying her burning secret in her bosom. And Miss Thankful dropped a word here and there to the effect that her lonesome life at the old Library was certainly beginning to " tell " on Axey Bodfish's mind.

IV

THINGS grew rapidly worse with the new custodian. Hindsight began to notice a change in her once mild demeanor. She became nervous and irritable, and whereas she had once loved the seldom-obtained society of her kind, and been what the neighbors called "real folksy," she now began to shun them with a painful shrinking from observation that was unaccountable. The scarlet brand was beginning to eat into her vitals.

"Thief," it gnawed at her soul; "Theft," it scorched into her nerves.

She had kept the money for so long that it had become impossible to give it up or even to mention it. The year had gone by, catalogues were being examined for the new books, and many were the confabs between Deacon Adams, Abijah Foster, and Ebenezer Jones. From these, Miss Achsah escaped as from some threatened doom. The horror of her mistake got mixed in with her religion and became an integral part of her solitary prayers. "Lord," she would say vehemently when she knelt down by her iron bedstead — "Lord, I'm not a thief — not even *Thou* canst make me out a thief. I kept that

money through a mistake. I've kept it all this time because I didn't know how to get rid of it. Thou knowest I haven't touched a cent of it, nor wouldn't if I starved, have I, Lord, — have I?"

In her anguish of spirit she reiterated over and over that pitiful appeal. Again she would break forth in impassioned petitions that the Lord would send deliverance in the shape of the rightful owner. And when she realized that such a respite would mean exposure, she would pray for deliverance by a miracle. Then she would forget all but the desired escape. "Just let me get rid of it any way, Lord," she would sob, hiding her miserable face in her pillow.

It wore terribly upon her strained nerves. At times she contemplated burying it in the ground, or submerging it in the nearest pond. But always the thought of the rightful owner and of her self-imposed trust deterred her. And so she, whose soul was incapable of dishonesty, dragged about with her the morbid consciousness of an unintentional crime. Every now and then the vision of 'Zekiel Plummer rose up and accused her. In her loneliness, she began to crave this once dreaded visitant as a relief from miserable solitude. Once she found herself facing the

imaginary student of theology, and saying with terrible earnestness:

"If it's yours, why don't you make out to take it, some way? Why don't you lift the curse from me, 'Zekiel Plummer?"

It was a great comfort to speak about it even to a spectre; and she tried to tell him of her visit to Miss Thankful.

"Didn't I go to see her, and tell her the money might be yours, 'Zekiel Plummer? And didn't she all but drive me from her door?"

But as Miss Achsah shut her eyes for an instant to repress the rising tears, 'Zekiel disappeared.

Although a woman scarcely in middle life, she began to show premature symptoms of age. Her hair turned gray. She was growing thin and wan, and her appetite had so completely gone that even an occasional dainty dish from some sympathetic neighbor failed to tempt her. She would sit for hours in the empty reading-room, her hands clasping and unclasping each other in her lap. At last she said to herself: "I guess I'll give up here. I don't believe as they'd want me any way — if they knew."

She made up her mind that, before leaving her post, she would give the mouldy old books that interior cleansing she had promised

them, and this time she began her work at the top shelf. By the second day she had reached the set of theological books behind which the money had been found. On opening one of these a faded paper fell out, and as it lay at her feet she saw her father's name written in his small, angular hand. She picked it up and read — his will.

After the date, some twelve years back, written in that very room, it went on to say, with characteristic directness:

“This is my last will and testament, and I be as hale in body and sound in mind as any man in Hindsight—a heap more so than Abijah Foster, though he calls himself a lawyer. I propose to leave and bequeath all my savings (of which I do not specify the amount, as I expect to keep on adding to it as long as I shall live) to my daughter Achsah Melissa, not because she is of much account, but because there's nobody I think any better of, and because I can't take it with me.

“I have hidden it behind this tenth volume of Dr. Bagwell's sermons, on the top shelf of the Free Library, wherein my life is spent, because I have no confidence in the Hindsight Savings Bank, and I don't place any trust in investments. It's more than likely Achsah will make a fool of herself when she

gets the money; but as I sha'n't be around to see, it is to this intention I set my hand and seal. And Otis Gifford shall be witness hereunto."

Then followed Welcome Bodfish's signature, and under it the thin, wavering chirography of Uncle Otis, who had long since departed this life. The other signature made Achsah Bodfish shiver—it was Ezekiel Plummer's.

When Miss Achsah had read the paper through, she fell to weeping from sheer joy at the escape opened to her. She snatched from her bosom the roll of bank-notes which had so painfully eaten into her peace of mind, and spread them on the table. She counted them over for the first time since that wretched hour when she had discovered their value and gauged the enormity of her mistake in proportion thereto.

She fell upon her knees and gave thanks.

"Oh, I'm so thankful, Lord, I'm so thankful! I knew I wasn't a thief, and Thou didst know it. But other folks wouldn't have believed in my honesty. And now they'll never have to know—never! for it's mine, Lord, it's mine; and all I've got to do is to keep it and be thankful, life everlasting. Amen."

She left her ladder standing, as she had left it once before, to go to Deacon Adams.

Just as she got to the door, putting on her bonnet as she went, Achsah turned her head and distinctly saw 'Zekiel Plummer slowly mounting the ladder. She stopped short and with a determined air marched straight to the spot. "You, 'Zekiel Plummer," she called out in a firm voice, "you may's well come down from there. There ain't any more sense in your masqueradin' around this place. The money wa'n't yours, and you needn't have pestered me with makin' believe to accuse me like you have been doing all along. I've always had too much conscience, anyway." (She apostrophized space, as the ghost had promptly evaporated at the practical turn she gave the matter.) "And I guess this is about the last time I'll let it get the upper-hand."

Then she looked fixedly at the empty ladder, and once more addressed the air:

"And what's more, I don't b'lieve there ever was any 'Zekiel Plummer in the hull business. I b'lieve 'twas all a hallucination."

V

ACHSAH hastened forth to interview Deacon Adams. There was rather more of reproof and less of politeness in his manner than upon the former occasion; for Hindsight thought that Axey Bodfish had grown very odd, and it was clear she "begretched" the new plans for improving the Free Library.

"Deacon Adams," she began quietly, but with so much of firmness and joy in her face that the old man looked at her twice before he was certain of her identity, "I found father's will in an old book. It's about that money. Here 'tis."

The deacon's countenance fell as he read the remarkable document. He could not be expected to share Miss Achsah's relief, nor to part joyfully with what he had come to regard as his own, in a public-spirited way.

"I don't know," he remarked stiffly, "as it's very complimentary. Welcome Bodfish never was a great hand for bein' agreeable. I guess, though, you don't mind the unpleasantness, as long's you've got the money. Six hundred and twenty dollars, wa'n't it?"

"Six hundred and twenty dollars and fifty



cents," corrected Achsah, coloring at a certain recollection.

"Well, Miss Axey, it's a good thing we hadn't bought all those books. I guess it's about as near to a donation as the Free Library'll ever get."

"The Lib'r'y'll get it all same," said Miss Achsah.

The deacon's face brightened a little and then settled back into its usual rigidity.

"Of course that's some consolation," he remarked. "But I'm a long sight older than you be, Miss Axey. 'Tain't likely I'll live to see any improvement at the old place."

"Deacon Adams," said Miss Achsah, trembling a little with the stress of her feelings, "the improvements'll go on just as we'd planned. I give that money to the Lib'r'y now — this minute."

The old man stared.

"You don't mean to say you're going to part with your patrimony right down like that — the hull of it?"

"'Tain't the hull of it."

She drew the old yellow envelope from her bosom, and with portentous gravity spread the bank-notes on the table, the five hundred note, the two for two hundred, the tens and the fives, one by one, before the deacon's astonished gaze.

When he had deliberately taken in the total, he eyed his visitor solemnly.

"You don't tell!" he said, in an awed voice; "you found that, too?"

"Yes, I found it."

"Land of Goshen! — it do beat all!" murmured the amazed octogenarian. "To think of Welcome Bodfish hiding all that money. Why, you're a rich woman, Miss Axey."

Then he recollected the fifty-cent episode and added with a twinge of nervousness: "And a generous one, too. I'm 'most afraid you'll remember against me that little mistake I made" —

"Never mind about that," interrupted Miss Achsah briskly. "I've made worse mistakes myself than 'most anybody I know."

"S'pose we search the rest of the books, Miss Axey? Mebbe there's more bank-notes hid away somewheres."

"No, there isn't," said the custodian of the Library positively. "I seem to know all about those books — inside and out. There's not a bank-note in one of 'em. I seem to know we've got to the end of that business. Good-by, Deacon Adams. I'm going to ask you to invest the money for me soon."

She put it back in her bosom where it scorched her no longer.

"Of course," fumbled the old man, holding

out his hand, "you'll be wantin' to give up the care of the books, Miss Axey, now you're a rich woman — and a public bennyfactor."

"Well, why?" she answered, with a characteristic Hindsight interrogatory. "I guess if I'm willing to give six hundred dollars for new books, I must have some sort of feeling for the old place. It'll make a difference, and people will come to read."

"Of course they will!" cried the deacon delightedly. "It'll be like a revival in learnin'! You'll have the gratitood of all Hindsight, Miss Axey."

Her face shone.

"I'd like the twenty dollars put into new carpet and things," she said.

"Certainly — certainly. We'll fix it all up, fine as a fiddle, for you. What's reason" — cried the old man, with a sudden illumination upon the subject — "what's reason we can't make the readin'-room into a regular rendy-voo for the young people? And what's reason we can't put all the new books there and call it the Achsah Bodfish room, hey?"

Miss Achsah choked a minute before she could speak.

"My land!" she almost sobbed; "it's a beautiful atonement. I've paid for that mistake to the last penny, and it's worth it all — the misery, and lonesomeness, and the

remorse. I seem to see myself there, a new creature, Deacon Adams, with new life into me, not afraid to hold up my head with the best, if only they'll believe. I'm happy to be — a public benefactor. But I'd rather you'd call it the Welcome Bodfish room. 'Twas father's money, and he saved it right there in the old place. He was custodian for thirty years, Deacon Adams, and he must have been terrible lonesome."

**HOW MISS PHŒBE GOT HER
CHANCE**



HOW MISS PHŒBE GOT HER CHANCE.

"I hardly ever look at a bent old man or a wizened old woman, but I see also with my mind's eye that Past of which they are the shrunk remnant.

"And the unfinished romance of rosy cheeks and bright eyes seems, sometimes, of feebler interest and significance with that drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its catastrophe."

George Eliot.

I.

"**L**AND sakes! Phœbe, who'd a thought it?"

"Thought what? You're dredfully tantalizing, Lucindy. When you get a letter you read right along same's if I wa'n't here and wanting to know. It wouldn't be so tormenting if you didn't exclaim over every last thing in it."

The speaker was small and spare, bent less

with age than with the rigor of life. She had mild eyes and a deprecatory manner.

The person addressed was tall, gaunt, hard-faced, less with a natural severity than with that same rigor. Her eyes were keen, her manner full of asperity. Both women had queer angular figures: flat-chested, thin-backed, obtrusive as to elbows and shoulder blades.

"Well, I never!" again ejaculated the taller spinster, still devouring her letter with a sort of repressed frenzy that was unconsciously reproduced by a more futile eagerness in the manner of the woman who regarded her with helpless curiosity.

"I never did make out to know," complained this injured person, "why 'Lisha's folks always write to you, anyhow, Lucindy. Ain't I the oldest? Ain't I got as good a right as you to be beforehand with a bit of news now and then?"

"Phœbe Higgins," broke in the other, regardless of injury or complaint, "Uncle Cy's dead."

"You don't say," began Miss Phœbe.

But Miss Lucinda cut her short: "And what's more he's left us money."

Miss Phœbe's mouth twitched. She could not articulate for amazement, but her thin lips framed —

"How much?"

"Five — hundred — dollars — apiece!"

The two sisters sat staring at each other with an exaggerated surprise that was more like consternation than exaltation. The pleasant events of their life had been so few that anything out of the common daily grind of small duties and sordid habits was met as a probable calamity.

After a momentous pause, during which their disciplined New England natures were determinedly adjusting themselves to the unexpected, Miss Phœbe ventured to speak.

"What'd he die of?"

Miss Lucinda shook her head.

"When'd he die?"

"I don't know. I guess it wa'n't more'n a week ago. 'Lisha's Mary wrote right off after the funeral."

"It must have been a fine funeral. Uncle Cy was uncommonly rich, Lucindy."

"Yes, he set a store by his money. Seems a pity he couldn't have taken something out of this world to turn to in the next."

"I shouldn't wonder if 'Lisha's folks would make ducks and drakes of the money in no time. Poor Uncle Cy!"

It was characteristic of these two women, and of hundreds of others brought up in the same stern New England school, that they

made no further reference to their own share in the dead man's hoardings, but treated the matter with a severe reticence made up partly of natural delicacy, partly of habitual self-control. The letter was read and re-read, discussed and weighed, each member of the afflicted family receiving some tribute of commiseration or congratulation, according to the point of view. But when the sisters roused themselves to the fact that it was past nine o'clock, and they had been guilty of a shameful waste of time and kerosene in sitting up so "dreadful late" over their scarcely touched scant supper, they began to move about their small abode, washing up the tea things and "setting things to rights" for the night.

Then they went to bed without another word; and both lay awake far into the small hours, poring in secret over the wonderful fortune which had befallen them. The next morning they met with a sort of shame-faced apology in the manner of each, as though detected of that unusual and unhalloved lying awake. Moreover, there was in the milder countenance of Miss Phœbe a strange and guilty look, as if she had been harboring some thought of which her sensitive conscience had not quite approved.

This soon wore off, and by and by the

legacy settled into an acknowledged fact. One thing Miss Phœbe could not get over talking about: that letter should have been written to her, as the elder, if not the more capable, of the sisters.

"Seem's though folks thought I couldn't make out to write a letter now and then. I guess I could fall to and express myself about as good as you, Lucinda, if I had the practice."

"Well," said Miss Lucinda, "you can answer the letter if you like, and make arrangements for getting the money. All we've got now is the promise."

"I guess not," said Miss Phœbe, still aggrieved. "I'm not that anxious to take up with somebody else's correspondence. 'Tany rate, you'd best ask Elder Hardhack how to go about it."

To consult Elder Hardhack was to let all Hindsight get wind of the legacy. In spite of Miss Lucinda's caution, the astounding news flew far and wide. In an incredibly short time the entire population had come with discreet questions or prying curiosity, according to their kind, and the "Higginses girls" and their fortune became the chief topic of speculation. Miss Phœbe and Miss Lucinda still treated the matter with a sort of awed reticence which lent a thrilling in-

tensity to the few conversations they permitted themselves on the subject. Something seemed to ferment in Miss Phœbe's usually tranquil mind, and at last it came forth.

"What'll we do with it, Lucindy?"

"Save it, 's far's I know."

"S'pose we spend just a little, because 'twas so unlooked for."

"What should we spend it for? You never was forehanded, Phœbe Higgins."

"Why shouldn't we go away somewheres for a spell?"

"Do *what*? Are you raving crazy?"

"No, I ain't. But I tell you what, Lucinda, I've never had half a chance. I've not complained, 's far's I know, but that's the hull truth."

"What kind of chance? Can't you talk plain common sense?"

"That's always your way, Lucinda; nobody's sense is common sense but your own. I tell you I've been kept down and hindered and made little of all my born days; and now I've got some money I mean to give myself a chance."

"Phœbe Higgins, do you mean to say you've turned sixty-five year, and yet you can set there and act like a spoiled child that's going to have it's own way, whether

or no, because it has got hold of a little money?"

"Well, yes, I s'pose that's about it. You may say what you've a mind to, Lucindy, and I ain't a-going to answer back. I've always took everything off you, and like's not you'll never know how masterful you've grown. But I'm the oldest, and now I've got Uncle Cy's money I mean to assert myself for a spell. You can come along or not, just as you've a mind. But I tell you fairly, I'm going to have my chance."

Miss Lucinda stood staring at the speaker in undisguised consternation. Miss Phœbe had always been the delicate one. She was small and shrinking in appearance, timid and hesitating in manner. While the younger and stronger sister had borne the brunt of work and worry, she had also usurped the responsibility and the credit.

"Sakes alive!" was all she now uttered, watching the hitherto meek little body tremble and vibrate with a sudden self-assertion and excitement.

"You needn't stand there and look dumb-founded," went on Miss Phœbe breathlessly, pouring out the torrent of grievances pent up for sixty years within her gentle bosom; "I've riz at last, and I'm not going to be put down yet awhile."

"Nobody wants to put you down," began Miss Lucinda; but the weaker sister's time had come. For once she took no more account of the voice she had been used to heed than if it had been the buzzing of a fly. The blood of the Puritan fathers had stirred within her, and her ship was launched toward a new world.

For several days Miss Lucinda watched her come and go with that new fire in her mild eyes, very much as one watches the antics of a hitherto tame cat that has shown sudden tendency to relapse into the tigerish propensities of its forbears.

"Who'd ever have thought she'd show her claws at her time of life?" was the perpetual reflection of Miss Lucinda, who was, after all, but two years her sister's junior. "It must have been that letter startled her. I wish to gracious 'Lisha's folks'd write to her once in a while. Mebbe this unlooked-for uprisin' wouldn't happened. I wonder now what she's turning over in her mind."

Presently the revelation came.

"I'm going to take a holiday — over to the 'Underwood.' Want to go along?"

Miss Lucinda's square jaw dropped. Never in her whole life had she been so nearly paralyzed.

"Where's that?"

"It's over to the Berkshyre hills. It ain't far."

"What's it good for — rheumatism?"

"Well, I guess it's about's good for people that's never had a chance as anywhere else. It's a fash'nable re-sort."

She jerked the words out as though they had been carefully selected and conned from an unknown language.

Miss Lucinda jumped up and let fall her knitting.

"Phœbe Higgins! I've borne with you about long enough in this tom-fool business, and I'm not going to stand another mite. You and I are no more fit for a fash'nable re-sort than we was for the kingdom of heaven in our unregenerated condition."

"That's just it, Lucindy," calmly interrupted Miss Phœbe, "we ain't any longer in the unregenerate condition of poverty. We've got money, and we're fit for kingdom come."

She laughed the dry, accustomed laugh of the hard-working New England woman. Miss Lucinda gasped.

"It's my belief your head's turned," she said.

"Mebbe 'tis. It don't much matter, I guess. All I want is to have my chance — just once. I feel's spry's a kitten, Lucindy. I mean to start next week."

Miss Lucinda resumed her seat, rocking and knitting in indignant silence for a few minutes. Clearly Phœbe's revolt was genuine. She began to see that she must compromise.

"She actshally intends to carry out that notion, and of course I must go along to look after her. The idea of Phœbe looking after herself's too preposterous. She's got no more responsibility than a new-born baby. To think of starting off in that innocent way without a speck of preparation!" But Miss Lucinda realized that she would have to use diplomacy, now that her more compulsory methods were gainsaid.

"I s'pose you know you haven't got a decent rag to your back?"

Miss Phœbe paused with a touch of her old-time hesitation.

"Well, I guess that's about so."

"We'll have to get Sarah Hobson to make us each a new gown," snapped Miss Lucinda, scoring one.

"Then—I s'pose you're going along, Lucindy?"

The question was asked with an odd mixture of relief born of the old dependence, and disappointment born of the new independence. The fixed habit of years struggled with the newly formed purpose to establish a different standard, and in her agitated soul

Miss Phœbe did not know whether to be glad or sorry that the enemy had come over to her way of thinking.

"Well, I guess you've never gone about alone yet," was the grim rejoinder.

Then Miss Phœbe rose. It was all very well for the enemy to come over, if that coming over was in the right frame of mind. The new standard was for something different from this, and the fixed habit must go to the wall.

"Lucindy, if you're looking to go with me over to the Berkshyre hills, or anywheres else where I count on having my chance, you'll have to drop that naggin' tone once for all. I'm goin' for a purpose; I'm goin' on my own responsibility, and I'm goin' to manage for myself."

"Sakes alive! Phœbe, what's come over you? You usen't to have so unruly a spirit."

And Miss Phœbe replied, out from the dumb endurance of a lifetime:

"That's so, Lucindy; I've not had any spirit whatsomever. But the Lord sent me one when He sent Uncle Cy's money."

II

IT is more than thirty years since Otis Gifford comforted poor Miss Patience Pinger with the perfume of his roses and the tenderness of his sympathy. It is more than fifteen years since Achsah Bodfish, clinging to the dusty shelves of the Free Library, came upon that doubtful hoard the secret of which had been to her so wretched a burden. And still Hindsight remains one of those obscure little settlements which hide yet in many out-of-the-way corners of New England. They are all much alike, even now, in their austerity, their painstaking appearance of making the most of things, and their absolute remoteness from everything like the exhaustingly rapid methods of modern civilization. In spite of its comparative proximity to several gay resorts, the Hindsight of to-day is as bereft of adornment, as devoid of amusement, and as given over to dull monotony as though the quiet Berkshire hills were vast ranges of mountains beyond whose inaccessible peaks the hope of the most sanguine inhabitant should never travel.

The local feeling in such places amounts almost to a religion. The inhabitants are in honor bound not to look beyond those hills.

While Miss Phœbe had lain awake that night thinking of Uncle Cy's money, an unlawful desire had sprung up in her slowly awakening fancy. A visit to the village utility store next day brought a copy of a Boston paper within her grasp, and over this she pored secretly, evolving such things as she had never before dwelt upon in her narrow, unaspiring existence.

A trip! The tempting advertisements of summer resorts from which the fashionable world made selection had never before touched the consciousness of Hindsight. One advertisement in particular lingered in the inquirer's mind, and seemed above all to offer that mysterious "chance" for which she had silently hungered and thirsted all her village-bound life.

"*The Underwood, the finest hotel in the Berkshire hills,*" etc., etc. There was a sketch of the hotel, with its colonial architecture, its grand portico and noble pillars, which pleased her refined taste. She said to herself triumphantly:

"That's the place. Lucindy'll think I'm crazy's a loon, and I don't know but I am. Howsomever, I'm not going to be shiftyminded. The Underwood's where I'm going as sure as my name's Phœbe Higgins."

And she stuck to it.

know. Besides, we want to look our best when we get there."

They drove in an old stage the twenty miles to Rockbridge, and took there the train for Cuttsfield, near which Miss Phœbe, aided by a railroad guide, had vaguely located the Underwood.

Her inward excitement had risen to such a pitch that she was incapable of enjoying the beautiful country through which they passed, but sat staring out of the window with unseeing eyes, and feverish spots burning in her faded cheeks. Miss Lucinda, who, strange to say, had begun to feel the absence of responsibility a relief, took in everything with the acute appreciation of a long-starved intelligence. She made a few remarks about the fine scenery or the people; but Miss Phœbe was too distraught to reply.

"She's never had such a heft on her," the stronger sister thought, almost compassionately. "She'll soon get enough of having her own way. She ain't used to it, and that's a fact!"

When they reached the station at Cuttsfield Miss Phœbe clutched her patent-leather bag and looked wildly about. "I don't seem to see it — the hotel," she gasped.

"Phœbe Higgins, I b'lieve you're thinking

of shouldering your satchel and marching to a 'fash'nable re-sort' on foot!"

Miss Phœbe fell back with a nervous laugh that was more than half hysterical. Then her eyes lighted on a stylish omnibus marked "*The Underwood*," which Miss Lucinda's sharp glance had observed before leaving the train.

"Well, I declare to it! If I didn't fail to see the hotel 'bus," she said, and made frantic gestures to the driver. He laughed, and indicated the antiquated travelling-bags to another man, who had them and the spinsters hustled into the vehicle before they knew they were observed.

When they got out in front of the grand portico, with its marble pavement and huge pillars, Miss Phœbe braced herself for the ordeal, while Miss Lucinda followed warily, with resolute lips.

It was nearly supper-time, and the porches and benches scattered over the lawn were occupied with denizens of the gay world, of the like of whom Hindsight had never dreamed. There were ladies with plumed hats and lace parasols, ladies in marvellous iridescent costumes and gowns of such fabrics as dazzled the sober eyes of the "Higginses girls," and put their countrified new jackets to shame.

The clerk, leaning over his desk, saw only two plain, middle-aged women, with spectacles, brown stuff dresses, and outlandish bonnets. He did not realize the thrills of tremulous expectation that agitated Miss Phœbe's breast, nor the five hundred dollars sewed into the oil-silk bag. Thinking he perceived two Salvation Army leaders, he said with off-hand politeness:

"What can I do for you, ma'am?"

Miss Lucinda grew rigid, but Miss Phœbe was too agitated to mark the manner of his address.

"We would like a room," she said, with a tremor in her voice.

"A room?" he echoed in surprise.

"Yes, on the ground floor, in case of fire."

"You mean, ma'am, that you wish to engage a bedroom, to stay here?"

"Of course," snapped Miss Lucinda, unable to keep silence. "Why not?"

Then she bit her tongue and waited for Miss Phœbe.

"Certainly, ma'am," said the clerk politely, and added:

"It's customary, you know, to pay for a week beforehand." By which he thought he had got rid of the Salvation Army.

"Well, if you like, it's the same to me." And Miss Phœbe opened her old knitted

purse, into which she had put a fifty-dollar bill. Not that she expected to need a quarter of it, but because the oil-silk bag was not quite handy.

"Will you please register?"

"Hey?" queried the innocent soul, peering inquiringly at the clerk; and again Miss Lucinda's superior wisdom was forced to the front.

"I'll do the registering, Phœbe, while you pay up."

"How much is it?" queried Miss Phœbe, trembling.

"Forty-five dollars."

"I don't mean for all summer," explained Miss Phœbe; "we're only calc'lating to stay a week."

"Exactly, ma'am. A first-floor double room is forty-five dollars a week."

Miss Phœbe turned pale and weak. Unconsciously she clutched the oil-silk bag on her bosom. The pen trembled in Miss Lucinda's hand, but she grasped it heroically, and went on writing slowly:

"Miss Phæbe Higgins, Hindsight."

"Miss Lucinda Higgins, Hindsight."

After settling, Phœbe turned to Lucinda with that pale, sick look still in her face. With New England women of her class, useless expenditure shocks the sense of decency.

"I guess we might as well go to our room, Lucindy."

Silently they followed the bell-boy, who carried a shiny black bag in each hand. When they were alone they forbore to look at each other. Two miserable tears stood in the corners of Miss Phœbe's eyes. Catching sight of them, Lucinda would not for the world have upbraided her. They stood about for some minutes; then Miss Lucinda fell to unpacking violently.

"We'd better take off our jackets and put on our knit shawls, Phœbe. I noticed the women out there"—with a jerk of her head—"don't seem to have on jackets."

Then Miss Phœbe broke down and sobbed.

"Oh, what's the use, Lucindy? We can't make ourselves look anyways like them. We don't belong to the same world. I feel ashamed, someway."

"Never you mind, Phœbe Higgins. Just you hold up your head. I don't b'lieve but what we're as good as any of 'em. Their fine feathers is all outside. I don't b'lieve one of 'em has got five hundred dollars quilted into her flannel petticoat."

Each knew the secret of Miss Phœbe's misery to be the appalling price of their room. But the New England reticence was equal even to that emergency. When they had

hung up their coats and donned their gray wool shawls, which they wore with rigid precision, they found their way to the dining-room. The frugal supper of their choice, made of tea and toast and a bit of squash pie, being over, they stalked heroically out through the marble-flagged portico and seated themselves side by side on a bench under the century-old trees.

They were two forlorn figures, ridiculously alike in their unlikeness to all about them; stiff, prim, homely, antiquated; looking as though they had stepped out of the graves of some long ago home-spun ancestors. Everybody noticed them: some critically; some appreciatively, as having found types; some compassionately, knowing that however long they might stay they would so sit, unapproached, unapproachable, unrelenting, alien.

Miss Caressa, who was still charming, full of sympathy, and overflowing with sentiment, remarked to Mrs. Jerold, with whom she was having a summer outing:

"Only look at those two old ladies! How forlorn for them to be at a place like this, where no one will notice them! I've a great mind to go and talk to them."

"You would probably only make them more wretched, my dear. Doubtless they have their own reasons for being here."

"But they may have come for pleasure, dear Mrs. Jerold, not knowing how it would be; and they look so very lonely — so altogether 'out'" murmured Miss Caressa.

"Your talking to them would not get them 'in.' Such things are hopeless."

How acutely Miss Phœbe felt the hopelessness, only she herself knew. Even Miss Lucinda, who had grown up and grown old beside her, thinking much the same narrow thoughts, had only a faint notion of the poignancy of her sister's disappointment. All that she said, with that bitter self-repression which is the Puritan dower, was:

"Seem's though I wa'n't going to have much of a chance, anyway!"

"Don't you give up so quick," said the woman of stouter nerve. "As like as not something'll turn up yet."

But nothing did turn up. For nearly a week of eternal days the two lonely women sat on the outer edge of that gay and gorgeous assembly, looking across the strip of grass between the social world and themselves as across a great gulf. Let no one think that because they were alien they did not feel the isolation.

The bench they usually occupied had its back to most of the laughing, chattering groups; and the two women rose up and sat

down automatically together as though worked by the pulling of one wire. When they went and came from meals, or when they took their solitary walks through the pretty town, they moved like wax-work figures. They talked little. Miss Phœbe never smiled. Once in a while Miss Lucinda relaxed into grim amusements at the silly doings of those other women who were not of her kind. The only creature Miss Phœbe noticed was Amy Caressa.

"She looks sort of nice," she remarked to her sister. "She's got what you might call an angel's face—all except that ridick'lous fancy hat."

When the week was nearly ended, and they were looking forward feverishly to the appointed hour of going back into that safe obscurity whence they had been so foolish as to emerge, Miss Caressa found the opportunity she had been waiting for to speak to Miss Phœbe, the wistfulness of whose face haunted her. For once Lucinda had left her while she went to write a letter to 'Lisha's folks. Miss Phœbe sat alone on the bench. The dull, monotonous details of her long, uneventful life were passing before her, under the scrutiny of an imprisoned soul that had missed its last opportunity, and knew it. The droop of her mouth was very pathetic,

although we are told that pathos in an old face is not interesting, but lugubrious. Even this one effort to be free of the trammels had failed, and she knew it.

"Would you mind my sitting by you a little while?" asked Amy Caressa, very sweetly.

"No," said Phœbe, eying her sidewise like a shy little bird. "'Tany rate, I guess the bench is free."

"Have you ever been here before?"

"Well, I guess not. I do'no as I'd have come if I'd known just what 'twas like."

"I have never been here either, until this summer. It is very pretty, don't you think so?"

"Oh, it's pretty enough's far's that goes;" then, after a pause, "The people here ain't much like our folks over to Hindsight."

"Hindsight is a New England village, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's that. It's a good enough place if you stay there. I guess Lucinda and I are about the first as ever tried a fash'nable resort. I guess we'll be the last."

"I'm afraid you've found it lonely without your friends?"

"Well, we don't set much store on having friends. It's the ways that differ. 'Tany rate, I guess I've had all the chance I'll ever get."



Amy Caressa looked at her inquiringly. Her eyes were so soft and sympathetic that the imprisoned soul in Miss Phœbe's breast made one wild bound and burst its bars. She poured forth unconsciously the secret of her stunted life, her starved ambition, her stifled hopes. Or so it seemed to the girl, who had a fine imagination which enabled her to gather the choppy sentences and broken fragments of speech into a continuous heart-rending story. . . .

"She has been kept down and hindered and starved all her days," Amy said an hour later to Mrs. Jerold, with tears in her pretty blue eyes.

"Who has kept her down? The sister, I suppose. She looks as though she could bite nails."

"No," said Miss Caressa, "as far as I could comprehend, Lucinda is good to her. It was just fate."

"And has not Lucinda been hindered by the same fate, my dear?"

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps Lucinda had the grit to rise above it. Only think of being crushed that way for sixty-five years!"

"She will live to be ninety, very likely. New England women do," remarked Mrs. Jerold, who had outlived the period of superficial sentimentality.

"But, dear Mrs. Jerold, she has never even had a letter written to her. Can you conceive of such a barren existence?"

"Mark my words, Amy, if Lucinda gets to hear of this confidence, she will help fate to crush her."

But to Miss Lucinda Miss Phœbe only said triumphantly, with the rare color in her cheeks:

"Lucinda, I've had my chance, after all. I've talked to that girl."

Exactly what had passed she never told. Indeed, it is doubtful if she knew.

III

THE next morning they went away all too willingly. No one had spoken to them except Amy Caressa. The clerk at the desk recounted his secret joke about the Salvation Army, and the guests, who had looked upon them as types, missed their prim, stiff figures moving automatically together. They had come and gone, no one knew whence or whither. To the big, flourishing hotel, Hindsight, not fifty miles away, did not exist.

Only one thing lingered in Amy Caressa's mind. That lonely, forlorn little woman had

never received a letter. Miss Phœbe's old grievance had come out and clamored with those deeper and hitherto unspoken yearnings. Of all the sad voices which cried through those broken bars, it alone was recalled ten days later by the young lady as she languidly opened her daily letters, notes, and other stamped etceteras.

She looked up half laughing.

"Mrs. Jerold, do you recollect the little old lady who was here, and who never had a letter in her life? Well, I think I will send her one. Here is a specimen of those teasing epistles, one of the 'chain' sort, don't you know?—where everybody must give ten cents, and write to everybody else to give ten cents, for some charity. I believe it might really interest her, over there in Hindsight, wherever that is. It might make her feel in touch with the world, poor soul! I could get her name and address from the hotel register. What do you think?"

"My dear Amy, you are clever enough to decide for yourself. You talked to the person; I did not. If you think she is childish enough to be pleased with one of those abominable letters, why, send it by all means."

"She was the most child-like person I ever saw," said Amy Caressa, considering.

And so it happened that into the prim serenity of the meagre little house in Hindsight, where the sisters had patiently resumed the homely duties of "fifty year an' more," which their mothers and grandmothers had each performed for her "fifty years an' more," and from which the subject of the Berkshire hills had been wiped as with a sponge, fell this letter like a bomb:

(No. 49.)

Miss Phæbe Higgins, Hindsight:

The St. Bartholomew's Guild, designing to raise a certain amount to aid in building an Independent Chapel at Henderson, Oklahoma, and not having the means to do so, could think of no better way to raise the funds than to form a chain in which you are asked to take part.

You are requested to make three exact copies of this letter, signing your name to each, and write the next number at the head of each. Send one copy to each of three friends, and return this letter with your name and the names of the friends you have written to, and ten cents, to Mrs. Basil Burgess, Henderson, Oklahoma.

Your friends are requested to do the same. So the chain lengthens. The parties receiving number 75 will please return their letter without making any copies, to the above address, as number 75 ends the chain.

This may be a small matter; but any break may involve serious loss to the enterprise. So faithfully do your duty, in the name and for the sake of Jesus.

Amy Caressa.

Miss Phœbe had received her letter with a tremor of nervous excitement that grew into wonderment as she saw the postmark, Cuttsfield. Then her heart sank.

"Lucindy, do you s'pose that man has sent for more money?"

"Nonsense, Phœbe Higgins! Didn't we pay what he asked for that room, and the trumpery vittles that wouldn't stick by a body's ribs more'n a half hour or so? Why don't you open it and see who it's from?"

Miss Phœbe opened it slowly. Her hand shook so that she could scarcely turn to the signature — "Amy Caressa." Then a wave of soft color mounted to her pathetic old face.

"Lucindy, it's that girl that spoke so nice to me. I told you she had an angel's face. She's gone and written me a letter."

"Well, why don't you read it?"

Miss Phœbe began to read slowly, carefully. She lingered over the "Miss Phœbe Higgins" with a thrill of gratitude at her hungry heart. Then she read a few words, wavered, went back, read them again, tried

to skip, got more and more bewildered, and finally laid down the letter and looked helplessly at Miss Lucinda, who was knitting and rocking.

"Lucindy, I can't make it out."

"Why not? Writing's too stylish, I s'pose."

"No, 'tain't the writing. It's curious. It seems as if 'twan't meant for me."

"Who's it meant for, then?"

"I do'no. P'rhaps you'd better read it."

"Phœbe Higgins! An' you've been wanting a letter to yourself all these years! Just read right along and you'll come to something. Girls is awful silly things, an' like's not it's full of some ridickerlous stuff about eternal friendship, and all that. You'll get the heft of it presently."

Miss Phœbe went to work again at the letter, the fluttering color gone from her cheek, the thrill from her heart. She waded through the whole miserable thing, stopping carefully over some words, hurrying through others. Then she laid it down without a word.

"Well?" said Miss Lucinda.

"It ain't for me, Lucindy."

"I s'pose I might read it, then."

"Oh, yes, if you like!"

Miss Lucinda stopped knitting, adjusted

her spectacles, paused in her rocking for a moment, and began to read. As she read a fiery gleam of indignation burned in her shrewd eyes.

"Well, I never!" she declared when she came to the end. "Of all impertinent things, this does beat! St. Bartholomew's Guild! —and Oklahoma! Where's that, I'd like to know? And Mrs. Basil Burgess! Who's she? And write three more like it to three friends, indeed! The next number. That's number fifty. Well, before I'd write myself down fool number fifty, three times, I'd — Phoebe Higgins, it's a mean insult. And the girl had an angel's face, had she? Well, I never came across her equal for outrageous impudence."

Miss Phoebe sat perfectly still. Painfully, and with an agony of renunciation, she was laying her one letter away with her one "chance," as something almost achieved, but that had somehow slipped from her fingers into the limbo of the forever unattainable.

At last she said:

"It's no use, Lucindy. Folks are born to things, or they ain't. I wa'n't intended to have things to my mind in this world."

The pity of it all, few as were the words, stirred a passion of resentment in the never

passive breast of Miss Lucinda. She rose in her wrath. But how impotent she was! Fate could not be quarrelled with. And yet she must fight some battle for the weaker creature who had failed so utterly to achieve for herself. She would wage war with that girl who had flung the taunt at her helpless sister.

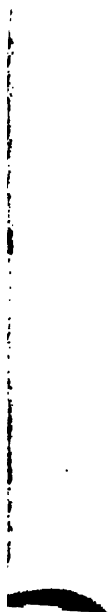
"And Phœbe kind of took to her so unsuspecting," she thought to herself, in suppressed fury.

"I'll answer it," was all she said. And this is the letter which reached The Underwood a day or two later, causing Mrs. Jerold convulsions of amusement, but to the everlasting regret and humiliation of Amy Caressa, whose good-natured little scheme had so hopelessly gone wrong! —

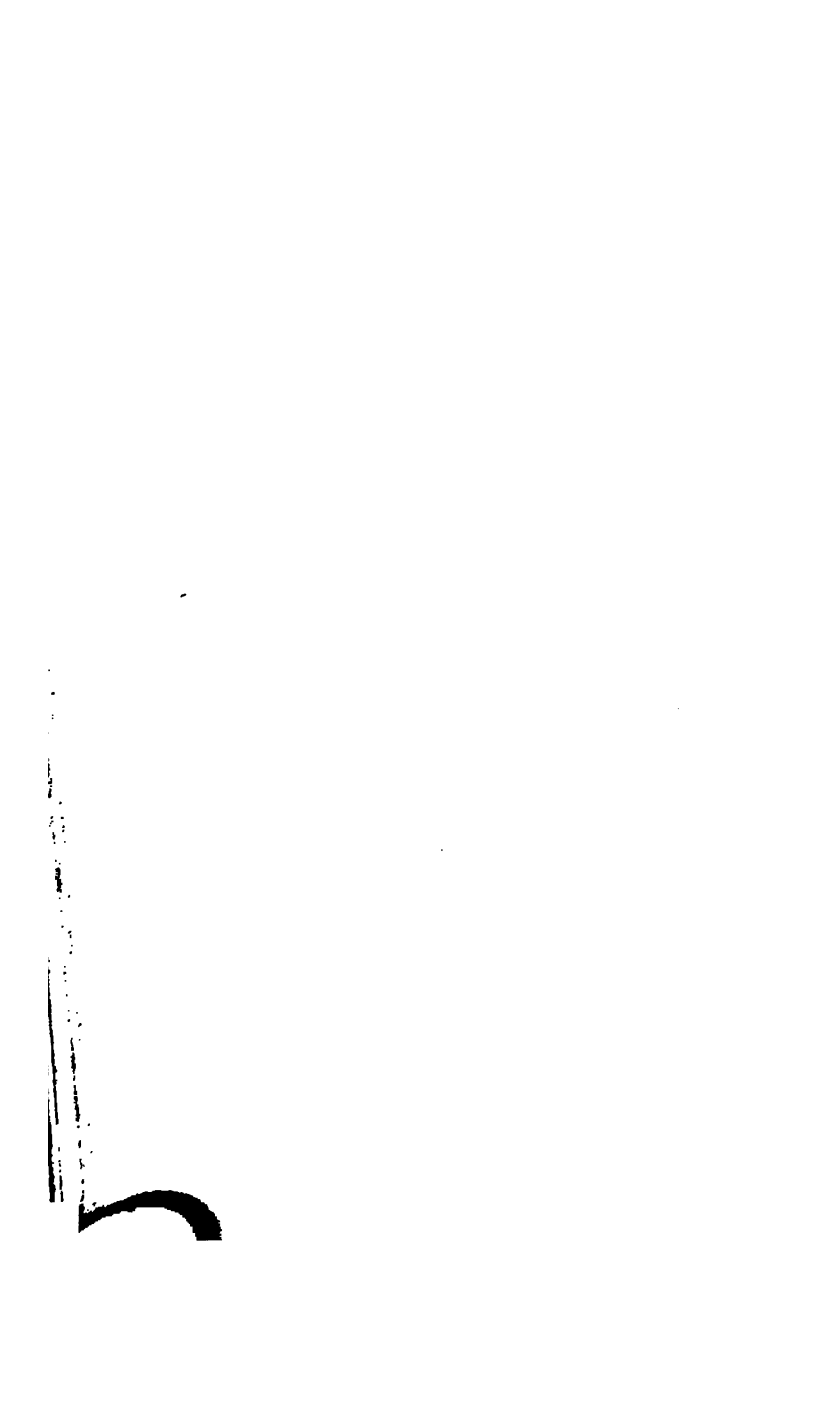
Madam I return you the impertinent letter you sent to my sister Phœbe Higgins who is as harmless and unprovoking a person as you could find anywheres and never insulted any one in her life we never heard tell of St. Bartholomew's Guild nor of Oklahoma nor of Mrs Basil Burgess as for an Independent Chapel me and Phœbe was brought up Congregationalists and we have our own meeting-place right here in Hindsight but we don't beg for it to strangers we may not be skollers but we were taught good manners some the rest

of the letter is too sackerligious for plain folks like us when you come to putting such things as chains of ten cent pieces on the Lord Jesus Christ all I've got to say is it wa'n't His way of working when He was down here to this earth He never ast anybody for a red cent that I heard tell of and I mistrust if any such unregular doings would meet with his personal sanktion anyhow.

*Yours truly
Lucinda Higgins*



**MISS LUCINDA'S SPELL IN
BOSTON**



MISS LUCINDA'S SPELL IN BOSTON

"Opportunity is not one vast front looming up before us as we travel towards the west, but something that we must wait for, and see rounded down and shaped for our hands to grasp. It is the fragments that lie about our feet which we stoop to pick up, and examine, and carve, and plane that make our lives."

John Ruskin.

I

- "SHE looks real peaked and spindling, same's mother did before she died," reflected Miss Lucinda, with an anxious glance at Miss Phœbe's thin figure. It had grown even more lean-backed and flat-chested than the previous summer.

"Sakes alive! S'pose she'd up and die!" The thought made Miss Lucinda jump, and the hook with which she was "drawing" a woollen mat clattered to the floor.

"Phœbe Higgins, you're getting to be

real mopy-like, always a-settin' by the fire and saying nothin'. I reckon you ain't ackshally ailing?" she concluded interrogatively.

"Well," admitted Miss Phœbe, "I don't seem to feel right smart these days."

"You don't go about enough. If I was to lop over by the fire all day I wouldn't feel smart neither. 'Twasn't never the Higginses' way to molly-coddle themselves. It don't agree with them."

"No," said Miss Phœbe, a little fretfully, "I s'pose not. It's all very well when you're 's strong's a horse to keep on going around, all for nothing. But when folks feel kinder tuckered out it seems as if they had to have something to move for, once they get settin'."

"I don't know what's come over you. I can't see what's tuckered you out."

"I reckon it's nothing."

They had lived together more than half a century. They had even loved each other in their hard-crust, unexpressive fashion all those long joyless years. And yet the sisters knew no way to approach each other either to give or receive sympathy.

"Well, I didn't make out to think 'twas much. Only you're getting to look kinder saller-complected. I allowed you might need some medicine for your liver."

Both sisters comprehended much more than was uttered in this conversation. Miss Lucinda knew that Miss Phœbe's dulness and lassitude meant more than a bilious attack; and Miss Phœbe had seen her sister give a great start and drop her hook.

"It don't strike folks all of a heap when they think somebody's liver's out of order," she said to herself.

She sat a long while trying to make up her mind to speak. If it had not been for that time last summer when she had broken the barriers—just once, when she had taken things in her own hands—just once, and spoken out only that once to a stranger who she believed had ridiculed her, she might have found it easier to open her heart to Lucinda. But the memory of those bitter days of mortification was always with her, reproaching her with her temerity, taunting her with her impotence, humiliating her with her unfitness for the something else she had so pitifully craved.

"If I was to tell Lucindy I was pining for a change agen she'd just look at me over them spectacles of hers and say, 'Mebbe you'd like the Berkshyre hills!'"

So she sat still and pretended not to notice Miss Lucinda's anxiety. The other woman kept on working and rocking. She was try-

ing to make up her mind to ask point-blank the question which rose in her shrewd mind. Reticence always died hard with Lucinda Higgins. It had to be killed afresh every time she forced herself to go beneath the surface of Miss Phœbe's milder reserve, which was more like diffidence, and would have given way gladly had there been anybody to break through the surface of habitual self-restraint. The tall old clock ticked laboriously in the corner. Miss Phœbe sighed. She had listened to that clock for more than sixty years, and each year, as she grew imperceptibly older, the ticking seemed to grow imperceptibly more labored and self-assertive.

"I wish 'twould stop for a spell," she said fretfully.

"You don't mean the CLOCK?"

"What else should I mean, Lucindy? Ain't a clock the only thing that's 'live enough to go, here in Hindsight?"

Lucinda drew a red strand through her gray background. Clearly it must come. She must have it out with Phœbe, now or never. With a sudden bracing of her whole protesting nature she killed her reticence.

"It's my opinion, Phœbe Higgins, that what you want's a change."

Miss Phœbe sat up in her chair. The

faint flush Miss Lucinda had seen before on rare occasions of great excitement rose to her pinched face.

"I didn't say's I did."

"No — you didn't say it; leastways, not in words. But ackshuns speak, once in a while."

"S'pose I do," said the poor little spinster, trembling. "'Tain't any harm, I guess. I don't expect to get it, all same."

One or two tears forced their way to her dim eyes, and she collapsed again into the calico cushions of her chair.

"Phœbe Higgins, I believe you think I'm naggin' you about it."

"Well — I don't know," said Miss Phœbe non-committally, closing her eyes. "You do a sight of naggin', Lucindy."

"What I mean's this," pursued Miss Lucinda, conscious that her reticence had died so hard as to make it unpleasant for the weaker woman. "You need a change to hearten you up a bit, and you're going to have it."

Miss Phœbe sat up again.

"I wish I knew what you're turning over in your mind, Lucindy."

"Well, it's about this: we've got pretty near all Uncle Cy's money left yet, and it does seem's if we might get the good of it."

"That's so," murmured Miss Phœbe.

"And I guess if you're peakin' and pinin' to take a trip we'd best start right off before everything's snowed up."

"I never said I wanted a trip, Lucindy, — never but once," faltered Miss Phœbe.

"Never you mind about that. Where'd you like to go?"

"No," said Miss Phœbe, a sudden panic of determination overcoming her usual hesitancy of manner. "I had my chance. I said where I wanted to go once. 'Twa'n't much. You'll have to manage this time, Lucindy."

"Well," said Miss Lucinda, after a pause, "there ain't so many places to go this time o' year. How'd you like Boston for a spell?"

The color came and went in the pathetic old cheeks. The heart fluttered more painfully. If Phœbe Higgins could have flung her thin arms around her sister's neck and sobbed, it would have been all right. But she couldn't. And had she done so Lucinda would not have known how to respond. Generations of stern, self-reliant ancestors said "Thou shalt not" to the emotions of these women. So they sat and looked at each other through their spectacles, Miss Phœbe's mild, wistful eyes and Miss Lucinda's keen, shrewd ones having much the

same expression behind the disfiguring glasses.

"Do you feel spry enough to start right off?"

Miss Phœbe got up with wonderful alacrity.

"I could start this aft'noon, Lucindy."

"Well, I guess there ain't any such terrible hurry. I guess next Monday'll do."

II

THEY did not pack the patent-leather bags this time. Their week's sojourn at a "fash'nable re-sort" the previous summer had taught Miss Lucinda several things. (It had taught Miss Phœbe even more; but that was between her and her own soul, and had nothing to do with travelling-bags.) An old trunk was exhumed from the garret, which, although of sole-leather, was fortunate in not being hair-covered. Miss Lucinda went so far as to have a new lock and straps added, which gave it quite a jaunty modern air. There was a curious quality of intuition about this homely old woman, who had never but once been out of the buried little town of Hindsight, which gave her a truly feminine instinct for femi-

nine things. She announced at once that their blanket shawls would not answer, nor yet their ancient mink tippetts. But the mistake they had made of going to Josiah Grant's for jackets was not to be repeated.

"Wait till we get down to Boston. Then we can buy the sort of bonnets and cloaks folks are really wearing."

For the next few days Miss Phœbe went about in speechless ecstasy. She had no notion what they would do in Boston, nor had she her sister's clear ideas about what she wanted to see. She was going somewhere out of Hindsight. That was enough. The miserable blunder of the previous summer was to be retrieved. Once more that "chance" she had thought forever unattainable was to be within her grasp.

"Never mind the puckered-up sleeves," she said almost jocosely to Miss Sarah Hobson, who was reconstructing their old dresses. "We'll buy new gowns when we get down to Boston."

The next thing they were whirling along on the five-hour journey to the Hub.

"She looks heartened up already," was Miss Lucinda's inward comment.

But Hindsight, gazing after the departing sisters with disapproving eyes, said:

"Who'd ever s'posed the Higginases girls

would have been so comflusticated with getting a little money, at their time of life, too! They haven't been fit for downright common-sense stayin'-at-home since old Cy Burbank died 'way down to Boston and left 'em each a legacy."

Little did Miss Phœbe care for the narrow disapprobation of Hindsight when once she had got fairly quit of it; while Miss Lucinda, whose tougher fibre assumed more dutifully the burden of conformity, secretly shook the clog of inherited prejudices from her feet, and felt her pulses beat with suppressed triumph. They were in Boston at last. Even Elder Hardhack's mournful farewell could not follow them. With consciences considerably lightened of hereditary traditions and restrictions they went forth from the respectable boarding-house Miss Lucinda had found, to "do the sights." They still carried their precious bank-notes, each in her chosen receptacle. Not one penny had they touched since that first awful ravage made by the "fash'nable resort." But now they were prepared to spend lavishly, at least in so far as lavishness is possible to New England women of their economical type. Hindsight would never know.

"Are we going to hunt up 'Lisha's folks right off, Lucindy?"

"Not if I know it," said Miss Lucinda, bridling with independence. "Wait till we've done the sights. I don't want 'Lisha's folks should think we've got to be seen to, same's if we couldn't look straight in front of our noses. And what's more, I don't want we should be hindered. Let's go get our bonnets and cloaks."

Now the aspect of either Miss Lucinda or Miss Phœbe by herself had nothing very remarkable about it, excepting the quaint, prim old-fashionedness of apparel. But the apparition of the two of them, precisely alike in figure, in action, in speech (save that one was tall and lean and the other lean and short), was so startling to the unprepared salesman that he very nearly laughed in their spectacled faces. It gave him a feeling, he apologized to himself, of seeing double. Miss Lucinda looked at him sharply as he made up a propitiatory cough. Miss Phœbe was quite oblivious of offence, as was her wont.

"I guess we'd best go where there's manners, for our bonnets and gowns," said the former, turning emphatically about.

The clerk, now self-possessed and exaggeratedly polite, assured the ladies that they had only to step into the elevator to be served to their minds upstairs. With the

swift rise of the elevator Miss Phœbe's stomach sank suddenly. She had just time to turn white and gasp, "Lucindy! I don't know but I'm going to have a turn," when the door slid open and Miss Lucinda dragged her out upon terra firma. She tottered for an instant and then braced her little body courageously.

"Well, 'twa'n't long getting up, anyhow," she remarked, looking reproachfully after the lift as it shot to the floor above.

When the gowns, cloaks, and bonnets were finally selected, the spinsters were reduced to a condition of bewildered exhaustion nearly matched by that of the unfortunate saleswoman who had endeavored to adapt Boston fashions to Hindsight's conceptions of style. At last they were clothed, but it cannot be said they were entirely in their right minds. They eyed each other surreptitiously. Miss Lucinda's grim and latent sense of humor got the better of her discretion:

"Land sakes, Phœbe Higgins, if you ain't a sight with that thing on top your head!"

"Wait," cried Miss Phœbe, nodding until her new bonnet wobbled. "Wait till you see yourself in your own glass down to Hindsight."

When the account was presented a grad-

ual consternation spread over Miss Lucinda's countenance. The amount she had in her knitted purse was short by six dollars and a half.

"Phœbe," she whispered, "how much've you got in your purse?"

"Not more'n ten cents. You're doin' the paying this time, Lucindy."

There was a moment of agitation, then Miss Lucinda bravely faced the issue. She spoke in a hoarse whisper:

"I haven't got the money—right here," she explained to the saleswoman. "It's real handy, though, if I could make out to get at it. *It's quilted into my flannel petticoat!*"

The Boston woman's countenance was sphinx-like in its gravity.

"If you will step into the fitting-room perhaps you can get it out."

"I guess I'll have to use scissors. It's sewed in real tight, with linen thread."

The operation was a slow one.

"I'm 'most afraid of snipping the edges," remarked the spinster.

"There's no hurry," said the lady politely.

When the operation was over, Miss Phœbe, who had experienced some vicarious mortification, observed with a quiet humor all her own:

"If I ain't mistaken the oil-silk bag's a

more likely place, after all. You can get at it from on top."

"Land sakes!" gasped Miss Lucinda, unnerved in spite of herself. "S'pose it had been that man!"

III

THE allotted time was drawing to a close, and the visit to Boston was nearly over. The sisters had missed most things they had intended to see, but they had also seen a good deal incidentally. They were to leave the city in a few days, and as yet 'Lisha's folks had not been looked up.

"I don't know as they'll care much about seeing us," remarked Miss Lucinda, with her keen knowledge of human nature, "and I can't see's we're beholden to them for Uncle Cy's money. Like's not we wouldn't have got a cent if the other heirs had been consulted."

"I don't believe they're that greedy, Lucindy."

"That's your ignorance of human kind, Phoebe Higgins. Folks would always ruther have everything themselves, no matter how much."

"Well, 's far's I know they've been decent

to you, Lucindy. Ain't they always written you letters?"

"That's so; 'Lisha's Mary has written me a sight of letters. I reckon we'd best go and see 'em."

Naturally the visit was embarrassing all round. Personally unacquainted kin who have been long separated by circumstances, as well as distance, have few points of easy contact.

"When you've nothing in common with folks, best let 'em alone," was one of Miss Lucinda's shrewd axioms which she now found herself violating.

The well-to-do Boston home, with its innumerable sources of outside interest and intellectual profit and extraneous culture, had about as remote a cognizance of the little insignificant Hindsight starting-point as of social life among the Zulus. The sisters were invited to luncheon on the following day, and went conscientiously, but with great reluctance, as they might have gone to assist at the laying-out of an unknown and otherwise neglected corpse.

"We will go to the Wagner concert this afternoon, and then I want to show you the new rooms of one of our Woman's Clubs, Cousin Lucinda," said Mary Burbank, bent on entertaining the guest in Boston-woman

fashion. "I fancy you haven't got a Woman's Literary Club at Hindsight yet."

"Well, I guess not. There ain't a half dozen women down to home ever read anything exceptin' the Bible and the Catechism. But we've got a Free Library with a readin' room into it all same."

(When Miss Lucinda was embarrassed the vernacular prevailed mightily.)

"Well, the Bible is certainly good literature," said Mrs. Burbank politely.

"Oh, yes, it's good literature's far's that goes! I've heard tell it's old-fashioned down to Boston."

"It's the fashion to go back to old things in these days, even in literature," said 'Lisha's Mary, not knowing any other subject to turn to. She was working hard over the country cousins. The hour of luncheon seemed interminable.

The concert was stupendous, but it cannot be said that Miss Phœbe and Miss Lucinda were pleasantly edified.

"If that's music, all that crashin' and bangin' and see-sawin' up and down without a mite of tune," said Miss Lucinda indignantly, as they came out, "I'd a sight ruther hear Silas Jones riz a hymn."

"Wagner's style is peculiar. People have to get used to it," explained Mary Burbank, smothering an inclination to laugh.

Miss Lucinda glanced at her with sharp misgivings:

"It's my belief, Mary Burbank, that that wasn't a concert after all, and they was jest tuning up and practisin' like."

In spite of her earnest protest the entertainer was compelled to feel that her guests more than half suspected her motives. The sisters were both abnormally sensitive. Miss Phœbe's sensitiveness showed itself in her shrinking manner. Miss Lucinda's took the form of determined aggressiveness which enabled her to stand up against the slights which she believed people were likely to put upon her. Her back now grew rigid. But Mary Burbank persisted in her good intentions, and the visitors were led up the steps and under the sacred portal of one of those women's societies for general advancement of which the Boston female is justly proud.

This particular association had not only literature in hand, but art and science, and all those many "isms" which it was well 'Lisha's Mary did not undertake to expound to Cousin Lucinda. There was a room devoted to each department; but as it was a brand-new organization, in a brand-new club-house, the works of art, as well as the scientific displays, were few. Only to the enterprising members were the walls covered

with prospective pictures, the shelves with promised samples, and the cases with valuable specimens to come. Miss Lucinda strode about in the art gallery in grim silence. The discourse upon Boston's women artists who were to offer their pictures fell upon unheeding ears. She stalked into the biological department and looked contemptuously at the half-empty cases.

"I do'no as a mangy deer and a lot of moth-eaten ducks is much of a show," she remarked.

"But they were prepared by our members, Cousin Lucinda. And Boston women shot them all."

Miss Lucinda stalked on, Miss Phœbe following timidly with Mary Burbank. She looked furtively at her sister's face and read signs of a coming storm.

"Lucindy's got something onto her mind," she said to herself. "She'll up and say it in a minute." Then to their conductor:

"I guess we've seen about all there is. S'pose we go." But Miss Burbank made a last mistaken effort to be courteous, and so precipitated the catastrophe.

"There is one more room," she said cheerfully, "where you may see what we women can do in the way of preserving natural" —

Miss Lucinda was out of hearing. She

had made for the room indicated, and as the other women approached the door they met her bouncing out after one petrifying glance at the contents. She gave 'Lisha's Mary a withering look that cast upon her personally all the odium of a contemptibly inadequate enterprise.

"A couple of bottled rats and a handful of pickled snakes!" she scornfully ejaculated. Then the storm fell:

"Mary Burbank, I'm morally certain all you've brought us here for is to make fun of us, because you take us to be countrified and ignorant. I thought as much when you set us down to that scrapin' and screechin' of fiddles an' trumbones and called it a concert. A Waggoner's concert! All I can say is, I'm glad we'd done Boston perfectly satisfactory before we looked you up."

Without another word she marched off with poor, expostulating Miss Phœbe, and they walked themselves nearly to death before they found their boarding-place.

"Well, what did you see to-day?" asked the landlady pleasantly as she opened the door.

But Miss Lucinda was still irate. She only snapped out as she brushed past:

"A few — pickled — snakes."

**MISS PHŒBE QUIT
HINDSIGHT**



MISS PHŒBE QUILS HINDSIGHT.

"Through the spaces . . . there came a shining visitor, the Angel of the Presence, he who comes but once and stands with beckoning finger. Him she followed up through the wood."
S. R. Crockett.

PRELUDE

IT was the following June after the flight of Miss Girondelle that Amy Caressa persuaded Mrs. Jerold to go back to The Underwood.

"You are unhappy to have lost Lady Blanche," she argued, "and the unsympathetic baldness of the usual summer hotel would be unendurable. Now The Underwood combines the rural with the urban in the most delightfully subtle way. You will enjoy the feeling of doing something picturesque, while in reality you will have all the comforts of the conventional."

When they were peacefully settled in that

little heaven-on-earth-at-five-dollars-a-day there came forth another thought which had long been growing in Amy Caressa's fertile brain.

"Don't you think," she began artfully, "that it would be charming to do the Berkshire region, not after the usual four-in-hand Lenox fashion, but in a nice, prowling, personal way that would take us unannounced into all sorts of unexpected small places which the world knows nothing about?"

"My dear Amy, there are no such places left. The summer coaching-party has long ago obliterated the primitive, even in this part of the world." (So was Provincialitis even yet unmindful of Hindsight.)

"Oh, yes, there are!" said Miss Caressa eagerly. "Don't you recollect those queer, prim old ladies whom we saw here two years ago? They came from some obscure little village with an impossible name — Hindsight, wasn't it? Only think of dropping down un-awares upon Hindsight!"

"There would be no place to drop into, my dear. And nothing to eat when we got there. Can you imagine anything more frugal and barren than the place those old creatures must have come out of?"

"We could keep the carriage and horses, you know, and drive back the way we went,

if the expedition proved a failure," coaxed Miss Caressa.

"Well, I will think about it. I'm rather luxurious, you know, Amy, and have no fancy for making unprofitable discoveries. Still, the novelty of the undertaking might be a compensation."

"Only think of discovering — Hindsight!" exulted Miss Caressa, knowing the day was won.

MORNING

Miss Phœbe Higgins had been failing all the spring. She seemed suddenly to be stricken by her years, in a way to which Hindsight was unaccustomed. Looking back, Miss Lucinda realized a gradual decline since the first "feeble turn" which the poor little body had endeavored to shake off by that wild journey to a "fash'nable re-sort." Slowly and surely the older and weaker sister had fallen away from health and spirits. And now that the long June days were bringing a temporary charm to Hindsight austerity, Miss Phœbe sat propped in pillows beside the window looking into the orchard. Silently she watched the waxing of small green apples as she had watched the waning of pink and white blossoms, wondering vaguely if

before the ripening of the fruit she would not have closed the long, dull annals of her simple life.

She was too weak to talk much. When she spoke it was to hark back upon earlier years, seeking to recall the sober pleasures scattered sparsely through a long, meagre existence.

"Don't you feel to go out a spell this morning?" asked Miss Lucinda, with primly veiled anxiety. "Seem's if you'd oughter set out doors awhile, a day like this."

"Well, I do'n' as I do," said Miss Phœbe gently; "the air seems to give me a pain to my chest. I guess it's good enough here."

After a pause she began hesitatingly:

"Do you mind that day we went picnicing over to Gifford's woods, when we was girls, Lucindy? And Abel Price was along. Abel certainly made out to be polite that day."

"Abel Price was no great," snapped Miss Lucinda. "'Twa'n't never in the Prices to be much account. Look what old Mindwell was."

"Abel was uncommonly polite to me that day," Miss Phœbe rambled on, with mild persistency; "but you was reel short with him. I've always thought, Lucindy, that

things might have been different if you hadn't showed him so plain what you thought about the Prices."

"Well — 'twas pretty near fifty year ago. I guess it won't do any good to talk about it now."

"No, 'twon't do any good, Lucindy, but I've always thought" —

The thin old voice trailed feebly off into a hopeless silence concerning those fifty years and their long-vanished opportunities.

"I guess if you'd take your camomile tea, and quit botherin' about picnics and things, you'd feel a sight better," remarked Miss Lucinda, covering with asperity any possible regrets.

Presently Miss Phœbe let her head fall back upon the pillows, and with a fluttering sigh her wistful thoughts passed into a vague dream. In the middle of it she seemed to hear a voice — a low, rich voice unknown to Hindsight — arguing softly with another voice that was familiar.

"I have come to see your sister," the soft voice was saying. "Some one told me she was ill."

"Yes, she ain't right smart," said the strident tones Miss Phœbe knew.

"May I come in?" asked the gentle voice again.

"Well, no, I do'n't as you may," came the familiar speech harshly. "I guess you're huntin' for types. That's what you grand folks call us, ain't it? We ain't curiosities, to be looked at."

"I wanted very much to see her," said Amy Caressa humbly. "I wanted to explain about that letter. It was a mistake."

"Well, I guess it don't matter. If you was to see her like's not you'd make another mistake."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" came Amy's voice, trembling a little. "I liked your sister so much! I am sure she would understand if" —

Miss Phœbe sat bolt upright, and the blood flew to her pinched face. She struggled for breath and strength.

"Lucindy!" she gasped. "Lucindy! I want she should come right in."

But Miss Lucinda did not hear the feeble cry, and the door was shut in Amy Caressa's face: when the grim-visaged woman returned in a few moments to the invalid's room poor Miss Phœbe was sobbing pitifully.

"You've drove her away, Lucindy, and I'd have given anything to see the pretty creature again. . . . It's same's Abel Price. You drove him away fifty years ago. . . . And you've drove away every-

body since that's ever come nigh to carin' for me."

A gray look that would have been pallor in a rosy face settled about Miss Lucinda's mouth.

"I thought I was protectin' you," she said.

"Yes — that's it! You're always protectin' me," wailed Miss Phœbe; "and I ain't wantin' protection. I'm wantin' folks. That's the hull truth."

"Phœbe," said Miss Lucinda, in a tone as of some awful renunciation, "if you feel kinder bad about it, I'll make out to go after her. I watched the carriage. I guess they're stopping up to th' Adamses'."

"Oh, if you would, Lucindy!" began the sick woman plaintively; and without another word Miss Lucinda tied on her bonnet, and went.

Amy Caressa was sitting on the bare, contracted stoop, her pretty flower-face drooping despondently. Mrs. Jerold, who had also alighted from the carriage, had swept magnificently up the narrow, ugly stairs, having just demanded indignantly of her subdued companion if twenty-four hours of Hindsight were not quite enough.

"I've come, ma'am," remarked Miss Lucinda, bringing up sharply in front of the young girl before she had an opportunity to

recognize her, "to say that my sister Phœbe hankers to see you. You can come when you like."

And before Miss Caressa had fully taken in the situation Miss Lucinda was stalking away down the dusty road.

Amy caught up her shade hat and hurried after the angular back; but Lucinda Higgins kept persistently ahead, and only at the pause of unlatching the little gate did she allow herself to be overtaken by the enemy.

"I'm so much obliged to you!" Amy was saying sweetly, although considerably out of breath. But Miss Lucinda marched her to the door of the best room and left her without a word.

"Dear Miss Phœbe," said the young girl, taking the outstretched fluttering hand in both her own, "how good of you to let me come! I've thought of you so often! I came to the Berkshires this summer just to find you."

And so it was that Hindsight came to understand Provincialitis. The slowly converging lines of destiny had brought together the sad, remote little New England village that knew not, and the insular little Southern settlement that would not. At last gray North and sunny South met in that embrace

of human sympathy which makes all men kin.

Miss Phœbe could not speak. Her heart throbbed to bursting. Words would have choked her.

"You can't think how awfully I felt," Amy went on after a pause, "when I found I had hurt your feelings. I ought to have explained to you that everybody was sending everybody else those 'chain letters.' I thought it might amuse you."

"We didn't understand," gasped Miss Phœbe, her dim gaze riveted upon the fair face bent over her.

"Of course you did not. It was a wretchedly foolish thing, and I ought to have known better than to send it. You will forgive me, won't you?"

Her smile was so appealing, her blue eyes so pleading, that poor Miss Phœbe was entranced. In all her narrow, hard-bound experience nobody had ever looked at her like that. In New England, people do not easily plead for forgiveness, at least not in that way.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, trembling with suppressed emotion, "I wish I could tell you what I think of your sweet face and your pretty ways! But I haven't the knack of words. Speech don't come easy with the

Higginses. That's why Lucindy was so short with you, and you mustn't mind."

The withered little creature was watching her guest's soft young face in an ecstasy. Presently she said shyly:

"I kinder took to you that day — over to The Underwood. And I've never forgot you. I've kep' that letter for want of something better — though I wouldn't for a sight have Lucindy know it."

The strain of Miss Phœbe's pent-up feelings was so excessive that tears came to Amy Caressa's eyes. What a tragic story of starved existence lay in the workings of that pitiful countenance! It all came back to her: how that poor stifled heart had burst its bonds and poured out a torrent of incoherent speech to her, a stranger, under the great elm trees two years before. And tears ran silently down her cheeks, falling upon Miss Phœbe's thin hand.

"I think," sobbed the poor soul when she saw them, "that you must be an angel sent to comfort me, at the last."

NOON

"My dear Mrs. Jerold," said Miss Caressa, joining her friend in the Adamses' stuffy little front parlor, "you are contemplating these sordid surroundings with amazement that

amounts to rage at finding yourself in such an unlovely place. You have certainly had enough of Hindsight."

"I am thankful to find you so reasonable, Amy. I was afraid you were going to be quixotic."

"So I am," lightly. "Don't laugh at me, Mrs. Jerold; but you are going back to the world of comfort and luxury, and I am going to stay here on a little missionary venture of my own."

"Amy, I might have suspected as much. I believe you came to the Berkshires for the purpose" —

"Of staying? No, really I did not. I only wanted to make my peace with that poor little woman. I did not dream she would need me."

"Need you? What folly! Of course she needs you. So do I. Who will look after my spiritual welfare when the heathen have gobbled you?"

"Only for a little while," pleaded Amy Caressa. "Only until Miss Phœbe goes to another 'resort'" —

"Do you mean" —

"Yes, I do. She is dying, Mrs. Jerold, and she thinks I am sent to her from a better sphere. If you could see what it is to her to have me! May I stay?"

Mrs. Jerold's thoughts flew back to the evening she had sat by Blanche Girondelle, all unconscious that her bright spirit was on the edge of flight. This other death-bed—it would probably be a sad and labored rending of spirit from flesh. For the sake of the happy woman who had gone so easily she would not deny consolation to the woman who had never known happiness.

"Stay with her, dear," she said, giving Amy one of her rare kisses. "I shall want you to do the same for me some day."

AFTERNOON

The summer had nearly vanished before Amy Caressa's mission at Hindsight was ended. The garden that used to belong years before to Uncle Otis Gifford, and was now annexed to the Free Library, was a tangle of late bloom. Over the cinnamon roses and sweet lavender beds still predominated the once beloved gladioli stalks; but in spite of old Miss Achsah Bodfish's efforts the weeds grew thick and fast where Uncle Otis had preserved a trim and stately array. Still, the ancient garden was a great delight to her. She did not grudge from her modest income the cost of having it spaded each spring. Amy Caressa passed it every day on

her journeys to and from the Higginses' cottage. Miss Achsah always nodded a friendly greeting.

"'Tain't what it was when Uncle Gladi-Otis was round," she apologized for her garden; "but it kinder makes the Free Library more folksy. Father useter think a heap of Uncle Gladi-Otis. But my land! They're both dead and gone this many a year. Have you seen the Welcome Bodfish Reading Room, Miss Amy?"

And when Miss Amy admitted that she had not heard of Hindsight's great acquisition she was taken into the unpretentious little room and told the whole story of the original Free Library, and the later addition. Of Miss Achsah's hallucination she learned later.

"Phœbe Higgins set great store by the new reading room," said Miss Achsah. "She didn't care much about the books, but she thought the carpet and chairs real sweet. I shouldn't wonder if she'd seen some just like 'em down to Boston where she and Lucindy made out to go last fall. She's been a sight weaker since that spell in Boston. I guess it don't suit folks to move round much. I guess they're better off if they stay where they're put. Mebbe it don't do to reverse the currents. . . . Wouldn't you like to come in

and set awhile some morning and read?" she added wistfully, thinking how pleasant Amy's bright presence would be in the not-too-much-frequented reading room.

"Indeed, I will. The first morning Miss Phœbe can spare me I'll stop in."

"Come right along and get all the flowers you want," said Miss Achsah hospitably, as she saw her guest gaze longingly at the fragrant roses. "That sweet-william's real handsome."

"I should like a few roses for Miss Phœbe," said Amy, helping herself daintily to a handful of choice blooms.

"I guess you ain't much kin to the Higginsses," remarked Miss Achsah, looking into the beautiful face and trying to trace some likeness to the homely sisters.

"No," said Amy, smiling, "only a friend."

"We knew they had folks down to Boston named Burbank," began Miss Achsah. "It's where they got their money."

But Miss Caressa shook her head.

"I am from Provincialatis."

"My land! Where's that?" said Miss Achsah, not yet illumined.

"It is in the South. I met Miss Phœbe in the Berkshires two years ago."

"Did you, though? Well, I wouldn't have thought they'd picked up a body so easy over

to a strange place. How's Miss Phœbe?" as the other started to move on.

Miss Caressa cast about in her brain for an expression that would convey to the provincial understanding an easy mind with great feebleness of body.

"I think she is comfortable, Miss Achsah, but she is growing weaker."

"I guess she's about on her last legs. Is Lucindy reconciled yet to your bein' around?"

The visitor bit her lip to repress an inclination to laugh.

"Oh, yes, Miss Lucinda and I are great friends! She did not like me at first, because she did not realize how much I love Miss Phœbe."

As Amy turned to go, carrying her flowers in the picturesque way she had of doing everything, she said over her shoulder:

"Miss Lucinda Higgins is one of the grandest women I ever knew. She would give her life for Miss Phœbe without a word."

And as she walked away, her pretty, airy draperies floating about her in a fashion altogether incomprehensible to Hindsight, Miss Achsah ejaculated once more: "My land! What can she see in Lucindy Higgins? I guess she's about like everybody else."

EVENING

At last there came a time when the pillows were not placed under Miss Phœbe's tired head. But the dim eyes were still lifted eagerly to greet Amy Caressa, who was yet as a heavenly vision to the dying woman.

"You've made me so happy!" she whispered. "It's worth all the waitin' for."

One evening Amy noticed a livid change. She glanced at Lucinda, who went out of the room hurriedly.

"Dear Miss Phœbe, may I read to you a little?" she asked, and when she saw a feeble assent she opened the Book and read softly:

"The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."

"It don't say Jesus," gasped Miss Phœbe, "but I guess it means Him."

"I think it does, Miss Phœbe, — for you and me," said Amy Caressa, holding the cold hand in her own.

"He seems . . . closer, don't He? I never could make out to understand the other Two." . . .

Amy began to sing softly, in her exquisite voice:

*"Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly" —*

and Miss Phœbe's eyes grew rapt and far away, as her soul took refuge in the beautiful old faith that has buoyed so many millions of souls out upon the dark waters of death.

Miss Lucinda came back and sat down beside the bed, her face gray and set. When the hymn was finished the dying woman returned for a brief space to earth.

"Lucindy," she whispered, "my little shell box." When it was put beside her she signed for Amy to open the lid. In it was a hideous purple satin pincushion shaped like a heart, and — the letter. Tears rained down the young girl's cheeks, but Miss Phœbe smiled.

"We understand now . . . don't we, Lucindy?"

And Miss Lucinda nodded without a word. The stern repression that concealed her anguish made Amy Caressa's heart ache doubly.

Miss Phœbe tried to lift the little cushion.

"It's all I've got for you to remember me by. . . . It ain't much. . . . Mebbe you don't think . . . it's pretty."

"I think it is beautiful," said Amy bravely, taking the poor, trumpery little thing. "I shall keep it always."

"It's satin. . . . I never had but that one piece." . . .

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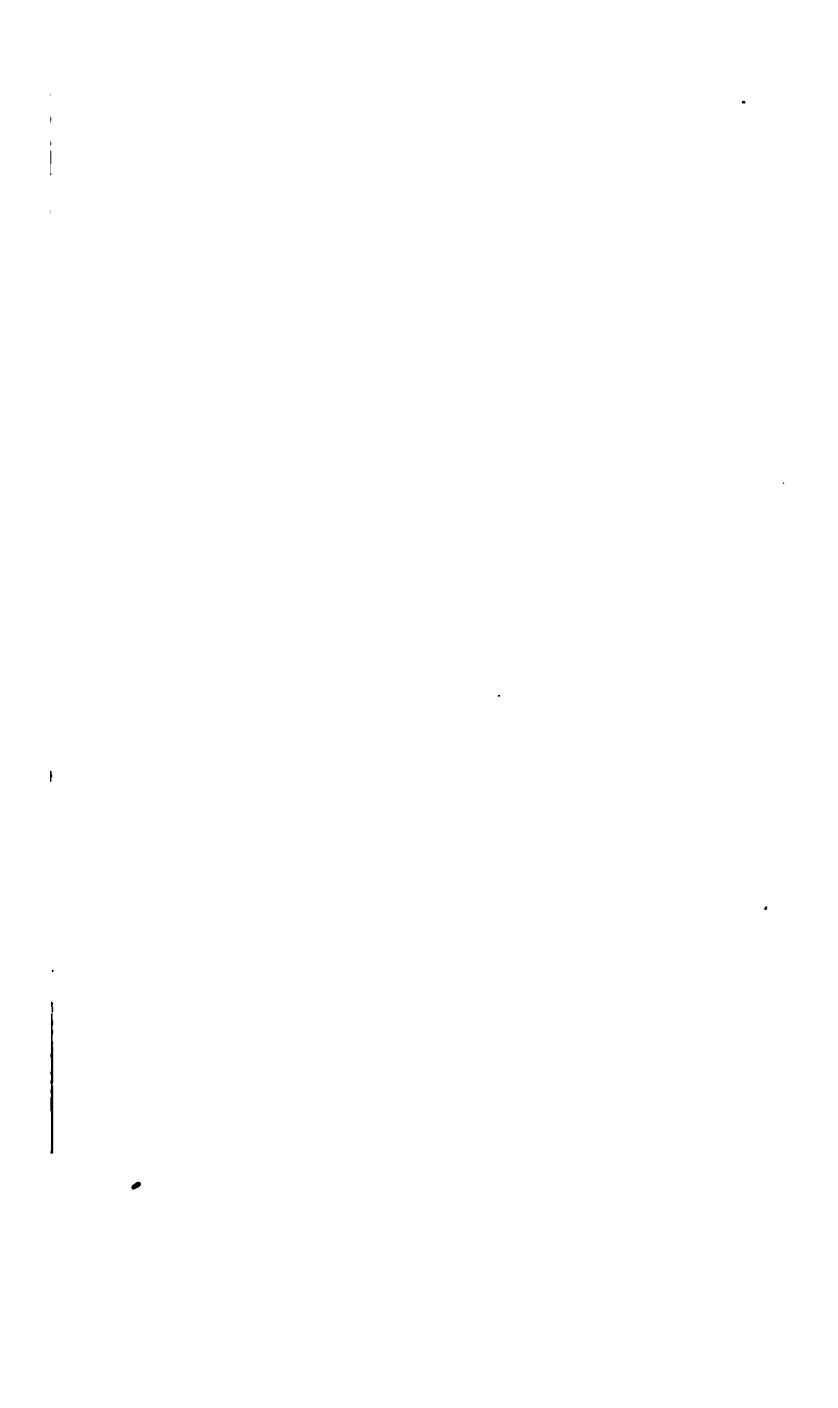
She fell back, and the two women watching her saw the indelible stamp set by that Finger which shall touch us all.

An instant later Miss Phœbe's eyes opened suddenly and wide. They looked young and clear. The Finger seemed to have effaced her wrinkles.

"Good-by, Lucindy! . . . I'm goin' off somewhere. . . . I'm goin' to quit Hindsight . . . for good." . . .

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